

College Composition and Communication

THE OFFICIAL BULLETIN OF THE CONFERENCE ON
COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

EDITOR

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Conference on College Composition and Communication

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The Graduate Assistant Reviews His Role¹

DORIS ROSS McCROSSON²

Because I felt that comments made here should be more representative than they would have been had I spoken from my point of view alone, I asked as many of my colleagues as possible their views concerning the advantages and disadvantages of being a graduate assistant instructor of English, and the problems involved in such a position. As many of them had been graduate assistants or instructors at universities other than Pennsylvania, their opinions reflect experiences at several institutions so that my remarks can be considered to be fairly typical. Their comments fell into the following general categories: professional development; the difficulties of combining study with teaching; guidance; relationships with the senior staff; and, of course, compensation. I shall discuss these topics in the order that they have been listed.

First, professional development. It almost goes without saying that the graduate assistant feels that he is getting invaluable experience in teaching while he is studying for his degree. All of us assume, correctly I hope, that the two or three years of teaching will be helpful in securing better positions when we complete graduate school than we might otherwise be offered. Many of us are convinced we will have a great advantage over scholars or fellows who lack this experience.

Not only is our professional development enhanced by actual classroom experience as teachers; we also profit by being better able to evaluate the performance of those who instruct us. In other words, we become more aware of

what good and bad teaching are. But, although we become more critical of our instructors, we generally try to profit by what we think are their mistakes and the practices we criticize in them we try to avoid in our own teaching. Thus, if we become impatient with them when they talk down to us, or when they stray too far from their subjects, we know what the reactions of our own students will be when we become patronizing or start to ramble. On the other hand, we can better appreciate the difficulties they have in stimulating discussion in a group of apparently apathetic students, for example, and we can better evaluate their solutions to such problems. If their solutions are successful, we attempt to utilize them.

Of course, this emulation can go too far. I know of one graduate assistant who copied her favorite professor's technique of silencing chattering students. However, when *she* stood up and, dramatically pointing to the exit, shouted "Out!" she did not realize that she was pointing to the windows instead of the door.

Barring a few such abortive attempts to make "the tricks of the trade" our own, however, we do learn to avoid or apply the techniques of teaching that we are better able to observe because we are more conscious of them.

Perhaps the only thing that could be construed as a hindrance to our professional development is that our teaching is usually confined to composition courses. Some of us think we could do well with the required survey courses in literature. Certainly there would be more carry-over between our own studies and literature courses. Too often during the first semester of teaching composition at least, we are only a step or two ahead

¹A paper presented in Panel IV, CCCC Spring meeting, Benjamin Franklin Hotel, Philadelphia, March 27, 1958.

²University of Pennsylvania

of our students in the technical points of grammar and sometimes, embarrassingly, a step or two behind. Nevertheless, most of us agree that by teaching composition we have the advantage of becoming more aware of our own writing. If we can avoid being influenced by our students to the extent that we are never sure of how to spell words like "dependent" or "desirable" without looking them up; if we can avoid becoming completely monosyllabic; if we can still write a sentence fragment without blanching or a compound-complex sentence without getting lost—then we become better writers.

Thus, by relearning the fundamentals of English grammar and rhetoric and by being better able to evaluate teaching techniques we observe, as well as having actual classroom experience, we feel that our professional development as teachers is enhanced. Our development as scholars, however, is another matter.

The primary problem of combining study with teaching is the problem of time. Often, during the first year and to a certain extent throughout our terms as graduate assistants, our own studies suffer because of the time we spend preparing for and teaching classes. During the initial year at least, we feel that we are just managing to slide by in the courses we take. Unfortunately, the marks we get sometimes confirm our fears.

Very few graduate assistants would solve this problem as did one of my acquaintances at another university. The semester before his assistantship was terminated, he met his classes about one hour out of every three, and the few papers that he assigned he did not grade. In meeting the conflicting demands upon our time most of us do just the opposite: we devote a great percentage of our available time to our teaching and let our own work shift for itself.

The majority of us spend, on the average, about 20 hours a week preparing for and teaching between 30 and 40 students for six hours. I am not, of course, taking into account the time we spend, particularly during the first year, in worrying about our performances as teachers, in bemoaning our inadequacies, or in picking the brains of our more experienced colleagues for solutions to our teaching problems. If we have part-time positions to supplement our incomes, we devote an average of ten hours weekly to them. If three courses are taken, approximately twenty-four hours should be spent studying for them. Admittedly, the total number of hours is only fifty-four; but occasionally, when students turn in term papers, for instance, either time spent on part-time occupations or on studying is sacrificed. Too often, it is our study time that is curtailed.

Perhaps some of the time spent in worrying about our teaching could be salvaged if there were offered to us an intensive guidance program during the first term. Comments from my colleagues concerning the guidance we need or do not need were plentiful and varied; but there is one point on which agreement was nearly universal. It is that we are reluctant to accept, and perhaps are repelled by, any conscientious attempt to teach us to become teachers. We agree that occasional meetings with previously announced agenda of pertinent topics for discussion are sometimes helpful, and that easy access to a library of reference materials and model themes is desirable. We also think that an atmosphere in which the new assistant feels free to consult appropriate members of the senior staff should be created if it does not already exist.

Furthermore, many of us feel that a clearly defined syllabus is absolutely necessary, particularly during the first term of teaching. It is more than a little

frightening to be given, as a new graduate assistant, a rhetoric textbook and a reader and be told to teach them. One of my friends, who had such an experience, "taught" both texts during the first month and then went to the director of freshman composition to ask for more material to teach for the rest of the semester. A syllabus, even if it were limited to listing week-by-week assignments, would have prevented my friend's mistake. Perhaps if such a syllabus had been used along with a few meetings in which someone illustrated how to teach a session in punctuation, for example, or how to discuss a reading assignment, she would have learned how to pace her teaching and her assignments.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that any of us need or want a rigidly enforced syllabus, even during the first term of teaching. We want a guide, not a Bible. As one of my colleagues put it, "We need standards, but we want few restrictions."

Any discussion of guidance necessarily includes remarks about visitations. How many times does the graduate assistant hear, "This is not a Gestapo," or "Now, we're not doing this to spy on you." Naturally our reaction is "Methinks he doth protest too much." If visitations are inevitable, we think that it should be admitted that they are conducted largely as departmental checks on the performance of the graduate assistant.

I do not think it makes much difference whether the visit is announced to the victim beforehand or not. If it is announced, nine times out of ten the new assistant will prepare, for the first time, a very learned lecture on an equally erudite subject. After a sleepless night of rehearsing, he dresses carefully, drinks four cups of coffee and goes to his class looking like something out of Charles Addams. Needless to say, while deliver-

ing himself of his lecture, the atmosphere in class, with the presumably unobtrusive visitant therein, is something very different from what it usually is. He is nervous, and his nervousness communicates itself to his students. What is most important is the fact that the students are adversely affected by the appearance of a stranger who is obviously there to check up on their teacher and, perhaps, themselves.

If the visit is unannounced, the assistant's opportunity to develop ulcers beforehand is gone, and of course he cannot prepare a lecture. The effect is still much the same, however, upon the students and the assistant; and often two or three sessions are required after the visitation to restore the atmosphere that was disrupted by it. And, as the result of either plan, it is no help at all later to be told that he should develop a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, or that his voice tends to become nasal; especially if he realizes that long before the visit he had successfully overcome any manifestations of nervousness and that his voice tends to nasality as the result of a sinus condition.

Perhaps the only really helpful visitation program is that which requires the inexperienced graduate assistant to visit several class sessions of faculty members who teach the same courses. In such a situation, the faculty member is not distressed at being observed, his students are not disturbed by the appearance of a stranger who could easily be just another student, and the assistant benefits by his observation of an experienced teacher's classroom procedure.

These, then, are some of our opinions concerning the guidance we feel we can profitably use. I am reasonably sure that most of us want to do the best job we can in our teaching. We can if we know what is expected of us and what we should expect from our students. We like a clearly defined syllabus as

long as it does not become an exercise in minutiae. We find formal meetings with other assistants worthwhile when discussion of the material we teach is encouraged. We are grateful for a library of reference materials and model themes. We like to be told frankly that visitations are primarily departmental checks on our performance; and we think that if we, in turn, visit classes of faculty members who teach composition we profit by our observation. But more than anything else, we need to know that if we founder, someone will gladly help us.

The "someones" I refer to are often our more experienced colleagues on the junior staff. But it is important to us to feel free to consult the members of the senior staff also. Such a feeling is the result of successful relationships between graduate assistants and the faculty. As students we expect to be judged and treated as the other students are; the fact that we are assistants as well should not materially affect this relationship.

At Pennsylvania we are fortunate in having just such a relationship. And we are twice blessed with a situation where, when programs or teas are held, we do not feel compelled to attend. Some of us have been at universities where we were forced to attend—voluntarily, of course—programs or club meetings. The penalty for not doing so was later to face the displeasure of those in the upper strata of the departmental hierarchy. I can assure you this is formidable enough punishment to contemplate so that so-called voluntary attendance becomes mandatory. Naturally, I assume such command performances are not the policy at most universities because they are satisfactory to no one involved.

If there is mutual respect and a reasonable amount of courtesy displayed on both sides, there is no reason to believe that the relationship between the junior

and senior staffs will not be mutually pleasant and rewarding. I do not know how this atmosphere can be achieved if it is not already in existence. I do know that it is the only atmosphere befitting a community of scholars.

The last topic I should like to discuss is the matter of financial compensation. We all realize what the problems are and have constant evidence that everything that can be done with limited budgets is being done for us. Still, it is an understatement to say that to live on a little more than a hundred dollars a month is difficult. If rent is about forty dollars and food another forty dollars a month, expenditures for other essentials such as books, laundry, haircuts, shoe repair, medical insurance, and so forth bring the total to roughly \$125. Yet there is no provision for what can be called entertainment. How many of us can resist the temptation to see *Long Day's Journey into Night*, or to hear Cal- las or the Philadelphia orchestra? Admittedly, these are attractions offered to us in Philadelphia or other metropolitan areas, but every college or university community has similar temptations. Perhaps we should forego these luxuries during the years we are graduate assistants, but to do so would be to curtail our natural development to the detriment of ourselves and our students. Another kind of self-denial we sometimes practice is even more serious: some of us postpone necessary visits to doctors or dentists. Such expenditures cannot be considered luxuries.

How, then, does the average graduate assistant live on his income? Generally, he doesn't—unless he is subsidized or can afford to go into debt. Otherwise, he can work during the summer and save perhaps four or five hundred dollars to be apportioned over the months he is at school; or he can get a part-time job while in school to earn the necessary thirty to forty dollars more a

month. The principal disadvantage of part-time jobs is that they cut down on the time he could use for studying. Furthermore, in dividing his energies among several occupations, the tendency is to become fragmented, so to speak, to the extent that he does not perform at top efficiency in any of his several roles.

The disadvantages of working in the summer are less obvious. They are mainly these: if he wishes to go to summer school or to work on his dissertation he cannot—at least on a full-time basis. Then, too, it is difficult to find jobs in our line of interests that are remunerative enough for us to save the necessary four or five hundred dollars. Often, for women at least, the only occupation that pays enough is waitressing, which is perhaps a broadening experience, but not a particularly stimulating one intellectually.

So far, I have drawn a rather dismal picture, but it is not an entirely accurate one of all three years. The first year is an adventure in ingenuity. The second year is a little more tedious: some clothing needs to be replaced for one thing. However, it is during the third year that the linoleum-carpeted, two-room apartment becomes more than merely grubby, and hamburger or scrambled egg dinners really begin to lose their appeal. Then we begin to wonder if we will ever again be able to buy a book we have wanted, or shoes that we need, without having to decide what to give up, or without feeling guilty afterward for having spent the money. As one of my colleagues said, "It gets to be quite a rat-race." And I agree. Under these conditions being a graduate assistant becomes a kind of trial by ordeal and the degree is that which we get if we manage to hang on long enough.

The logical solution, of course, is to quit and to go into business or industry.

But it is surprising how many of us are seriously interested in becoming teachers and scholars. It is an inescapable fact, nevertheless, that these years of constant financial strain take a toll upon our enthusiasm, drain our energies and resources, and inhibit, to a certain extent at least, our intellectual and professional development.

All of my colleagues who commented on the question, "How much do you think our compensation should be?" suggested that they needed between \$1,800 to \$2,000 a year to live decently. This sum, which would be \$1,550 to \$1,700 after taxes, we do not justify by implying we are worth that much. We simply mean that we cannot live on less for any length of time.

Up to this point, my comments seem largely to have dealt with the negative aspects of being a graduate assistant. It is true that we sometimes feel that we are grinds, that our existence is cheerless, and that we never have the time to do what we want to do. It is also true that we welcome an opportunity to discuss frankly the causes of these feelings. However, there is one truth that is implied in all of our discussions although it is seldom stated. I should like to state it now.

Few of us would voluntarily give up our assistantships because few of us would seriously consider any career other than that which we are now preparing for. Most of us believe that the temporary hardships inherent in our present positions are more than adequately compensated for by the fact that we will soon become members of one of the most satisfying and stimulating professions open to any human being. We know that our present experience opens the doors to an exacting but rewarding life. That is the life we want to live. That is the life we hope to perpetuate.

Current Solutions for Teaching Maximum Numbers with Limited Faculty¹

GEORGE S. WYKOFF²

A recent reliable summary says that 1,704,000 students were in college in 1945, 2,695,000 in 1955; in 1965 there will be four and one-half times the 1945 number, or 7,677,000³. In 1975, according to another estimate, 9,000,000 will be, or trying to be, in college.⁴ What these figures mean applied to freshmen and to composition, I leave to your imagination.

As the crisis sharpens, as an already short supply of teachers becomes shorter, we are told we are not making the best use of our time, energies, facilities. Some theorists even assert that productivity of college instructors can be increased 100%⁵. Though we doubt it, it could be true.

My assignment is to suggest as many facets of the problem as possible, from available literature or from spontaneous suggestion. Some of these ideas—divine, earthy, or from that third area which also produces fertile ideas—have been hinted at or given in some detail at past CCCC and NCTE meetings.⁶ Future meetings are being planned to deal solely with the subject of this afternoon's session. The value of these ideas, some

of which I do not like any better than you do, will be proved by time and experience.

Our problem has two general solutions. I. Greater and more effective use of mechanical and other supplementary aids. II. More effective use of personnel. But throughout this discussion let us remember that, no matter how large our enrollments, a vast difference exists between *meeting classes* and *teaching students*.

I. Supplementary Aids

Television. Newest and most interesting of methods using machines is TV—closed circuit or commercial. Applied to composition, television devices were explained and demonstrated at the CCCC meeting a year ago,⁷ and have been presented today. Concerning English, the most complete discussion thus far is a report for the NCTE Committee on College English for Non-Major Students, by Henry W. Kepler, entitled "English via Television," in *College English* (October, 1956). This report indicates that little is being done on TV with composition, but from it and other sources we learn of teaching experiments, now being conducted or in the planning stage, at some of the state teachers colleges in Pennsylvania, the University of Washington, the University of Illinois, Purdue University, and elsewhere. For the information and guidance of skeptics and enthusiasts, I strongly recommend that each experience be briefly but adequately described, evaluated, and made available through one of our professional publications, preferably CCC.

Kinescopes, motion pictures, film

¹A paper presented in the First General Session, CCCC Spring meeting, Hotel Morrison, Chicago, March 21, 1957.

²Purdue University

³Robert E. Iffert, "Staffing Institutions of Higher Learning in the Next Decade," *Higher Education*, XIII (December, 1956), 66.

⁴O. C. Carmichael, "The Size of the Problem," *The Educational Record*, XXXVI (July, 1955), 205.

⁵"I believe we might double the productivity of college instructors."—Statement attributed to Clarence Faust, Vice President of Ford Foundation for Advancement of Education, in a speech to representatives of the Association of American Colleges, as quoted in *Washington Evening Star*, January 8, 1957.

⁶See especially *College Composition and Communication*, VII (October, 1956), *passim*.

⁷John H. Hoagland, "Closed-Circuit TV at New York University," *College Composition and Communication*, VII (May, 1956), 67-70.

strips, slides, recordings. Presumably a recording—technically, a kinescope—could be made of each live television show, and in future years used instead of a live show. Possible also are carefully planned movies of the materials in the first place—enough for a weekly presentation throughout a quarter, semester, or year—professionally produced, and rented or sold to those institutions unable to make their own; or such movies could be made by institutions having the equipment, likewise sold or rented to others, perhaps edited or adapted year by year to fit current needs. The virtue of this plan is that the number of students would be limited only by the size of the viewing room. Lacking TV or motion picture facilities, ingenious departments can work out a series of film strips or slides (as was done at the University of Texas), utilizing many materials from TV or motion films. Numbers reached simultaneously would not be so large, but could be several times larger than the present average class.

Lecture. Since TV and other mechanical devices, especially in cutting costs and conserving manpower, are predicated on "the lecture method," a skilled lecturer can lecture once or twice a week to large numbers of students, with students meeting for discussion and writing in smaller groups with graduate assistants. The method has been successfully used in such fields as chemistry, history, economics, and American civilization. Applied to composition, the method was eloquently and forcefully presented at NCTE in St. Louis last November, on our general subject, by our present chairman here, Joseph Schwartz.⁸ Experimentally, the plan was used at the University of Texas from 1954 to 1956, under initial supervision of William Peery, present dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Tulane Uni-

versity.⁹ Of 45 class meetings, 18 were devoted to lectures before a group of 150 students, on subjects like *What Freshman English Is All About*, *What a Theme Is and Isn't*, *The Verb and You*, *How to Choose the Right Word*, *How to Tell What is So and What Isn't*, *How to Take Discussion Quizzes and Examinations*. Lectures were illustrated by about 900 2 x 2 colored slides, and by seven black and white sound training films. Smaller groups met twice a week with assistants for drills, tests, class themes, and discussions. At the end of the first year, experimental groups had performed slightly better than conventional classes. Given, therefore, the same careful thought and planning that go into TV and other machine-based programs, the lecture-plan could be reasonably or highly successful; it would eliminate the de-personalizing criticism applied to machine-based methods.

Practice Leaves, Exercise Books, Handbooks. We can stretch our energies further by making more effective use of practice leaves, exercise books, and handbooks. For those who use them wisely, the time-saving value of exercise leaves is obvious. Similarly, a handbook—as a handbook, not primarily a textbook to use and complain about in class—should save us hours by letting it replace our explanations and elaborate comments on student writing. As one colleague has said, the best place for the handbook, like the dictionary, is on the student's desk—a further application of present tendencies to put more responsibility on the student.

In this connection, if we in CCCC could agree upon and complete what should have been done years ago, we could save still more time and energy. I mean a uniform, universal system of grading symbols and of numbered refer-

⁸For brief summary, see *College English*, XVIII (February, 1957), 280, 281.

⁹William Peery, "Freshman English and the Enrolment Bulge," *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*, XLI (December, 1955), 575-583.

ences to writing principles. Then, no matter what handbook, or how frequently we changed it, or what kind of course in composition, elementary or advanced, or what variety of papers we read—symbols and “rule” references would have the same number, the same limited meaning for every student, every teacher, every kind of writing criticism.

Theme Reading. Of the various mechanical devices, only one bears on theme-reading. It is intriguing: the use of an Edison Electronic Disc Voice-writer.¹⁰ The instructor reads each paper, but indicates orally all corrections, suggestions, and a general estimate on an inexpensive plastic record. The student plays this record back, marks his own paper, makes his corrections. Each record also serves for review, for a check on improvement, can even be amplified and with an opaque projector serve the entire class as a mechanical audio-visual aid. When the semester is past, records can be “cleared” to use again. For its promise of time-saving, the method deserves further experimentation.

Of these various supplementary aids, major criticisms concern dubious achievement and loss of personal contact. A general criticism has been well expressed by President Victor L. Butterfield of Wesleyan University: “With additional masses of students there will be an intensification of mass learning processes, of large lectures by means of loud-speakers, radio, and television, of more textbook learning, more objective testing and curve grading—an expansion of all the methods, in short, that make for the passive, regurgitated learning that does so little to stimulate positive curiosity and creative thought. The talents of good and gifted teachers, hard to come by in any case, will be even more

widely dispersed and dissipated through the educational spectrum.”¹¹

II. More Effective Use of Personnel

In considering our second general solution—more effective use of present personnel—I pass over, as unrelated to our specific subject, the problem of additional sources of personnel. Instead, our limited supply must somehow stretch to include theme-reading, for if students are to improve in their writing, obviously teachers must read this writing carefully, sympathetically, even cruelly, and constructively.

Student Participation Plan. A plan receiving considerable attention advocates that students in a class—in groups of three or four—do much of the preliminary reading and criticism of papers. Various labeled Developmental Writing, Partner Method of Review, Collaborative Group Plan, or Student Participation Plan, it has been described by one of our speakers. As used at the University of Oregon, a good introductory review of its inauguration and first year was given in last December’s (1956) *College English* by Charlton Laird.¹² He and others at Oregon freely admit that the plan is not new with them, although I believe that no other institution has given it such careful thought and supervision in order to find how efficiently it works. The plan has been successful with Air Force personnel at Air University, Alabama, using mature students averaging in age about 32 years and with varying degrees of education;¹³

¹¹Victor L. Butterfield, “Dangers in Expansion,” *The Educational Record*, XXXVI (July, 1955), 207.

¹²Charlton Laird, “Freshman English During the Flood,” *College English*, XVIII (December, 1956), 131-138. See also John C. Sherwood, “The Oregon Experiment: A Final Report,” *College Composition and Communication*, IX (February, 1958), 5-9.

¹³Francis E. Drake, “Developmental Writing,” *College Composition and Communication*, I (December, 1950), 3-6, and Ray C. Maize, “The Partner Method of Review at the Air Command and Staff School,” *College English*, XII (April, 1951), 396-399.

¹⁰Nachman Cohen, “Correcting Compositions Without a Pencil,” *The English Journal*, XXXIX (December, 1950), 579, 580.

at the other extreme, the plan worked with high school sophomores at Our Lady of Mercy School, Detroit, Michigan.¹⁴

Writing Laboratory Plan. A writing laboratory plan, not remedial but regular class work, assumes that two two-hour weekly laboratory meetings are equivalent to one three-hour class; that if 25 students are normal for the regular class, the two lab classes with 15 students each, take care of 30—an increase of 20 % in teaching with no increase of teacher labor or time. All work except appropriate composition exercises is done in class: writing, reading of papers, 10-minute lectures using visual aids, with such instruction instantly implemented. Main feature is the tutorial method: students write continuously with the teacher moving from student to student, offering on-the-spot advice.¹⁵

Abolishing small classes. In the air at present are job analyses, surveys of how long it takes to do a job efficiently—even intangible jobs of professional people like teachers. These may alter high school and college patterns of teaching. Overworked high school English teachers have 150 students, five or six or more classes a day, a weekly load of 25 or 30 or more hours in the classroom; they do their preparations and paper work at nights and over week-ends. At the other extreme—how long can college English teachers justify a teaching load of six or nine or even twelve weekly class hours? How long can we justify literature classes of 4, 6, 8, 10, or even 15 students? Are we meeting unprecedented enrollment problems with such small classes in literature and with 30 to 35

students in composition? Can we persuade die-hard literature teachers who in the past have had nothing but contempt (mild word!) for the composition teacher to help meet our major English-teaching problem, the man-sized job of making young America literate? These Machiavellian questions I am asking, not answering.

Theme Readers. If teachers are extended by additional class-room hours, papers could be read by others—a plan that many dislike as not best for students. If we must come to it, a large pool of such readers is available among better upperclass English majors, graduate assistants, and housewives who majored in English as undergraduate or graduate students. By a Machiavellian calculation, one teacher and one reader could do the equivalent of two teachers' work at a 25% saving in dollars, since readers could be engaged at the lowest possible rate; they, too, have no union.

Other Departments. Can we find assistance from all non-English staff members on the campus?—the oft-repeated bromide, in high school and college, "every teacher an English teacher." Not a dual course jointly planned between English composition and other subjects; not a cooperative plan used in some universities; and not a follow-up plan used in many institutions to maintain English standards among upperclassmen—but a plan whereby, from his first day on the campus, a student's use of clear, correct, effective, appropriate written and spoken English is the serious concern of every college or university teacher. Have we made conscientious efforts to make such a plan work?¹⁶ Have we

¹⁴Sister Mary Hugh, R.S.M., "Visual Aid Versus Red Pencil," *The English Journal*, XLI (May, 1952), 266-268.

¹⁵Charles H. Green, "Function of Writing Laboratory in Solving the Problem of Increased Enrollment (in English Composition) While Maintaining Effectiveness of Teaching"—two-page mimeographed report, Purdue University, October 31, 1956.

¹⁶For suggestions, see Marvin J. Barloon, "How to Teach Students to Write Clearly in Courses Other Than English," *A.A.U.P. Bulletin*, XXXIX (Summer, 1953), 286-292; and Milton Milhauser, "The Universal English Program at the University of Bridgeport," *School and Society*, LXVIII (September 11, 1948), 174-176, and "Universal English at the University of Bridgeport," *College English*, X (March, 1949), 340, 341.

had joint meetings with other departments? spoken out in faculty meetings? encouraged wider use of essay examinations so that students will do more prose writing than one brief weekly (double *e*) theme? made available an all-campus style manual of symbols and virtues and vices of writing, to be used by *all* staff members? May we dream that this plan, rigidly and generally applied, will give such excellent training that after one semester, 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25% of our students can be exempted from second-semester and later follow-up training in writing? Aside from our time and effort to make the plan effective, I think of only one serious objection: much more needed time of non-English staff members who, like us, are faced with this problem of increasing numbers.

Fitting demand to supply. The 'final proposal—perhaps to end all proposals—is deceptively simple: fitting the number of students to the number of teachers available. It means basically that the quality of teaching is paramount to meeting any huge "x" number of classes with

huge "x" enrollments. At some of our colleges with limited facilities and high standards, students await their turn in being admitted; at some universities, a teacher signing for summer work teaches if enough students enroll; otherwise, he takes his turn, in rotation, the next summer. In reverse order, a director of composition—after carefully considering size of his staff, available qualified personnel, number of classes, number of students permitted in each class, effectiveness of supplementary aids—such a director of composition permits students to enroll until quotas are filled; all remaining students are given priority for class enrollment the following semester or year. If a director of composition sticks by his guns and his principles, I cheerfully agree that he would be promptly fired; if his head backs him up, he would be fired, too, as would presumably any dean or president who defies statistics by putting quality of teaching above quantity of mass. Even with its many merits, this proposal was obviously not conceived in heaven; and on this diabolical note I close.

Toward Standards -- Goals for the Program and Staff¹

DONALD R. TUTTLE²

In considering the situation of freshman composition and communication courses and their teachers, I find it much easier to diagnose than to prescribe. Although I have taught this course for more than a quarter of a century, the more I try to answer the question which Mr. Hicks has assigned to me, the more complex it appears. There simply are no neat and easy answers. What I shall at-

tempt here today then is to break the problem into its parts and to suggest rather than to prescribe possible ways of dealing with them.

The proper solution of most educational problems starts with the selection of a well-prepared and dedicated teacher. If he is a good enough man, all else follows, even good teaching conditions, the second requisite, for he will join with others to define the conditions necessary to do good work and to make them prevail. He should be able to define the objectives of the course; design it; find

¹A paper presented in Panel V, CCCC Spring meeting, Benjamin Franklin Hotel, Philadelphia, March 28, 1958.

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effective teaching methods, proper texts, and other materials; and evaluate the results of his teaching. The chief advantage of our attempting to work out standards in these areas is to save him time and to help him in negotiation with his administration and colleagues. But his ability and preparation should be such that, given time and experience, he could work out as good procedures as any professional society could do for him, particularly if he were associated with a staff as well selected as himself. I feel so strongly about this matter that I am tempted to say, "Find a good man and get out of his way." But this is too simple.

Now in talking about standards, we can mean two things: the goal we wish to attain or the minimum which we are willing to permit. Ideally, we should hold to the view that only a college teacher who has attained the doctorate should be considered a full-fledged member of the profession. Yet we all know brilliantly effective teachers at both undergraduate and graduate levels who never were awarded the degree, often by personal choice. Our danger here is the temptation to substitute an arbitrary and easy-to-identify measurement for personal judgment. If we are to press for high standards, we also need to establish some agency qualified to judge the exceptional person who has arrived at competence through other than routine channels.

But because of the financial problems of many graduate students and the staffing problems of institutions of higher learning, to require the doctorate of the beginner is obviously impossible. Furthermore, from the standpoint of effective guidance, it is desirable for the student to learn from experience before he achieves the doctorate whether or not he really enjoys the teaching profession and is suitable for it.

When should this experimenting be done? It is entirely unfair to freshman

students of composition or communication to put them under the *ordinary* M.A. candidate. If we think that the freshman course is the most important course in the college curriculum, or even one of the most important ones, we will not staff it with underprepared teachers. I seriously believe that even the best-educated teacher can bring most of his knowledge to bear on the freshman course, and that he will never cease to find new knowledge that can be applied to teaching it.

From the above remarks, it should be clear that I agree with the College English Association report *Doctoral Studies in English* that some sort of teaching internship for doctoral candidates should be required; I should like to see teaching experience combined with a seminar or conference on teaching methods and materials. But this internship should not last more than one or two semesters. The College English Association report is quite correct in saying that graduate assistants should not be looked upon as "cheap labor" to be exploited to their own detriment as scholars and at the expense of their students." We should insist that, once their one or two-semester internship is completed, they be rated as part-time instructors and paid according to their experience in that rank.

Before leaving the discussion of graduate school preparation for teaching, I should like to make two more points. First, since many college teachers begin their careers with the M.A., their preparation in linguistics should be part of the M.A. requirement. Although I am not a professional linguist, and the course I took twenty years ago would not suit some of the modern proponents of this occult science, I am fully convinced that it has proved of more value to me in teaching freshmen than any other single course I have ever studied. The time to take it, then, is before the prospective teacher has entered his professional ca-

reer. Second, the time to check on the candidate's ability to write is prior to the completion of the Master's degree. I do not see how any university worthy of the name can risk its reputation by granting the M.A. to scholars who cannot write.

Thus far I have been speaking of the qualifications of a teacher, because standards in the hands of the incompetent are meaningless. Next I wish to say a few more things about conditions of teaching, for unless these are designed to make it possible for the teacher to do his work well, reasoning about standards is an ironic joke.

First, maintaining truly collegiate standards is impossible in an institution not organized as a community of scholars. The establishment and enforcement of academic standards must definitely be within the province of the faculty. One cause of weakness in some junior colleges, for example, is that many of their administrators gained their experience in the militaristic line-staff system of the old-fashioned high school. Under this system, decisions about curriculum, texts, methods of teaching, course requirements, selection of teachers, standards for promotion, etc., have been set up for those who know what they should be by those who do not, and the ones who know say, "Yes, sir." Too much of this sort of administration is practised in teachers colleges and even in some institutions bearing the name *university*. No institution of higher learning should gain our sanction unless it provides adequately for control of academic matters by the teaching faculty.

Second, teachers of composition and communication must be able to attain sufficient rank to sit in the top councils of their institutions. I see no reason why a teacher of Freshman English should not aspire to a full professorship; in most colleges, almost all English teachers

teach the freshman course regardless of rank.

Third, to maintain standards, the chairman of the English department must have power to recommend appointments of teachers to the administrative heads of the institution. A dean or president should have veto power where the suggested person does not meet other special purposes of the institution, as for example in a college that exists for avowedly religious purposes. Nevertheless, the person best qualified to judge a good English teacher must initiate appointments.

The next requisite is to provide the teacher with a reasonable load. The National Council of Teachers of English at its annual convention, November 28, 1957, resolved:

That for college composition and communication classes as well as for the elementary and secondary school classes, the number of students assigned to any one section be not more than 25, and that the over-all assigned load be limited to not more than four classes in high school, or 12 semester units in college.

This resolution needs more publicity than it has received, for some members of our profession are teaching under very difficult conditions. Professor George Kelly in his admirable committee report "A Study of Teaching Conditions in Freshman Composition" (*College Composition and Communication*, May, 1956) shows that the median teaching load in the state and private universities and private four-year colleges covered by his study was the recommended twelve semester hours, but that in public four-year colleges was fourteen, in teachers colleges 14.5, and in junior colleges 15. Some teachers had loads as high as 16 or 17 hours. When you consider that the institutions requiring the heavier loads also are likely to have no entrance requirements beyond high school graduation, you can see what these

teachers face in trying to maintain standards. In class size, the median for all groups except teachers colleges was twenty-five students or below; the median for the latter was twenty-eight. Unfortunately, with the median at twenty-five or close to it for all groups but private colleges, nearly half of the teachers were actually handling an overload, according to NCTE standards. How much of an overload becomes apparent when we see that a class of thirty-seven in a junior college and one of forty in a teachers college were reported. Although the NCTE standard would set a maximum of one hundred students per teacher as a full load, teachers reported as many as 141 students in state universities, 130 in private universities and public four-year colleges, 120 in teachers colleges, and 156 in junior colleges. The only group meeting the spirit of the NCTE standard was the private college one, with a maximum reported of 101 students. Except for carefully controlled experiments with larger classes, like that at Oregon, should we not insist on the NCTE standard? Would any other measure show quicker and more favorable results than this in the improvement of college English?

Having secured adequately prepared teachers working under good conditions, we next need to consider where to set standards in the collegiate program and what those standards should be. There appear to be three major points where standards can be set: at the time a student is admitted to college, at the end of the freshman program or at some point in this program, and at the beginning of the junior year.

Strictly speaking, a college ought to deal with ideas and principles, not with skills. It is not appropriate to teach fundamentals of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics on the collegiate level. Students of this age are ready for some really challenging experiences in

learning and thinking. They are at an age where memorizing and drill are especially irksome. Not only that, but their habits of expression are deeply grooved by this time, and it is a major enterprise to change them—and to keep them changed, as we all know only too well. Instead of dealing with the development of style and power in expression and with critical reading, we find ourselves struggling with fragments, comma splices, faulty pronoun reference, disagreeing subjects and verbs, bewildering spellings, and punctuation poured out of an indiscriminating pepper shaker. What the professor is prepared to teach and what the student wishes he were ready to learn must too often wait while the student struggles out of his illiteracy.

No program to improve standards will be realistic unless it does all it can to help the secondary school do its work well. We can help the secondary school teacher by advertising in every way we can the need for smaller and fewer classes, by improving certification requirements in our states and regions so as to make the teaching of English a profession, by making sure that our own colleges recommend no teacher for a certificate in any academic subject without the written consent of the appropriate academic department head, and by devising the best program of teacher education that we can. Next, we must back up the high school teacher by insisting upon four units of English for college entrance in those states where only three are required by the state. Otherwise, we have no one more than ourselves to blame for the state our freshmen are in. We should make clear to the secondary schools what preparation we expect of entering freshmen. Finally, when possible under the law, we must work for reasonable entrance requirements for college freshmen; where the law is too unrealistic about the capacities of high school graduates, we must strive to get

it changed. I see no reason why all high school graduates should not take an examination such as the College Board. Results should be carefully compared with success at various types of institutions, and some sort of minimum standard perhaps could be evolved. State institutions might not be able to insist that a student be in the top half of his high school class, but they could try to exclude those in the bottom third. Also high school guidance programs and college admissions counseling can do much to redirect unqualified students.

High school administrators have been doing some hard thinking about this problem. Mark Schinnerer, Superintendent of the Cleveland Public Schools, has proposed two types of high school diplomas, one really an honorable discharge for those young people who have done their best in a curriculum designed for their capacities; the second, a diploma for the students of average or better-than-average ability who have taken an academic program. It should be easy to persuade state legislatures to allow institutions of higher learning to accept only those with academic diplomas.

In regard to English, it might be possible to insist upon the passing of a proficiency examination. I am aware of the current controversy between proponents of standardized tests and those who argue that there is insufficient correlation between results of such examinations and grades on themes. Accordingly, they argue that part of the entrance requirement ought to be a theme graded according to carefully determined standards. But the proponents of such a plan admit that the difficulties of administering it are nearly insuperable.

My feeling is that we could require a minimum level of proficiency in the kinds of things standardized tests measure adequately, such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage, provided

that we could bring ourselves into reasonable agreement as to what items it is defensible to insist upon. This provision is the rock on which the standards movement will probably disintegrate. The argument that such tests merely measure ability to proofread does not impress me; if a student can do well on such tests, he can learn to correct and proofread his own writing. For the other more creative matters, I would be quite willing to take the student intelligent enough for college work as the well-prepared high school teacher working under proper conditions would send him to me. These things can be taught in college in a reasonable amount of time, along with the more difficult technical problems that are beyond most high school students. In this discussion, I have chosen to concentrate on writing and fundamentals because no matter how the freshman course is organized, whether it be in the traditional way or in a communication program, and whether literature is emphasized or omitted, these elements are common. However, I should be inclined also to experiment with scores on reading tests to see at what point it is unlikely that a student can be expected to do passable work in college.

For those interested in the possibilities of tests, one of the most significant experiments is now being carried on in Mississippi. Professor Patrick Hogan, Chairman of the English Commission of the Mississippi Association of Colleges, in a personal letter has described a six-year effort in that state to get all collegiate institutions to cooperate on testing the proficiency of entering freshmen in English. Such tests are not being used as a means of setting admission requirements but for sectioning and for purposes of comparison. The project is going ahead, though facing difficulties. Using a composition test at this level

was adjudged desirable but too time-consuming to be practicable. The information gained from this experiment should prove useful in thinking about our problem and in discussing it with the public.

Because of the legal restrictions against entrance requirements and the size of public institutions, which now prepare more than half of the college students and at the height of the enrollment bulge seem likely to be preparing two-thirds, the most feasible step may prove to be the application of standards at the end of some term after the student is in school.

If the profession can agree upon the items to be tested, I urge that the standardized test in fundamentals be given after the first quarter or first semester. Those not demonstrating a reasonable level of proficiency should be required to repeat the course. For colleges still retaining a remedial course, admission to the credit-giving course should be contingent upon passing this examination. The time to clear up these mechanical matters is obviously as early as possible. It should be unnecessary to deal with them except incidentally in the rest of the composition and communication program.

The next step is to develop a national standard of theme grading. Differences at the top of the scale are probably of less importance, but if we all had a clear picture of the "D" and "F" theme, we could guarantee that no student could gain a college degree who did not have the capacity to write with reasonable clarity.

Many significant attempts are being made in this direction. Most teachers of English are acquainted with the University of Illinois *Standards in Freshman Rhetoric*, published January 15, 1956. This document, distributed to all freshmen, defines the level of proficiency required to attain the various marks. It

threatens with failing grades themes containing a number of specified errors. The chief objection expressed about this approach is that it places too high a valuation on the mechanical aspects of writing, upon correctness; that it is wrong to fail a theme which shows great originality and life for the misspelling of three common words. Its acknowledged virtue is that every student knows in advance what the penalties for blunders will be. That the system allows for positive excellence at the upper end of the scale is not always recognized.

Other significant efforts have been made by the Kentucky Council of Teachers of English and by the Iowa and California Councils, for example. The fall, 1956-57 issue of the *Kentucky English Bulletin* is devoted to "Principles and Standards in Composition for Kentucky High Schools and Colleges." The number starts with a statement of principles occupying some sixteen pages. Although the document places considerable emphasis upon what students should know about grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics, nevertheless it contains the following statement: "A few teachers look with some favor upon the establishment of a system of penalties for mechanical errors, but others oppose this view on the grounds that it encourages in both teacher and student an attitude that it does not much matter what is said just so long as no rules are broken. Without exception, those who graded the themes in this booklet seemed to be unwilling to set a low standard so far as mechanics are concerned; at the same time they insisted that a theme be more than a set of sentences grammatically correct and properly punctuated and capitalized." Then follow sample themes with marks and comments. Grades given the same papers by forty or more college and high school teachers are tabulated. College teachers were understandably somewhat more severe, but on the

whole, despite a few wide divergencies of opinion, most of the marks were not more than one grade-level apart. In other words, starting from a common conception or statement of principles, teachers can approach a reasonable uniformity of practice.

Experiments in theme grading at Princeton in connection with College Board Examinations have also demonstrated that after a reasonable amount of training, well-qualified teachers can evaluate themes with surprisingly consistent judgment.

Such experiments suggest an approach that we could make. Could we not develop a booklet to be used by interns in graduate schools, by new teachers in their in-service training programs, and by experienced teachers in their daily work? Could we not supplement it by having friendly roving teams of highly experienced graders setting up periodic theme-grading clinics on the various campuses? Would not this procedure be a help to those of us whose grading may have insensibly fallen off because of the nature of the entrance requirements at our colleges or because of administrative pressures not to fail too many students? Could not this program secure sizeable foundation support?

Such a plan could help with the problem of what to do about the faulty preparation of many graduates of junior colleges who are now flocking into the upper division of the colleges and universities of many states, students often woefully underprepared because of the unselected nature of the student body, the poorly prepared and overloaded teachers, and bad administrative practices characteristic of many of these institutions. How unfortunate the situation is is illustrated by figures supplied me by Professor Hogan about the results of junior proficiency tests administered at Mississippi State College. In this program, an attempt is being made to

maintain the English proficiency of Mississippi State students who have completed Freshman English and to check that of students who have transferred from other colleges or from junior colleges. Juniors are required to write a theme of 500-700 words under examination conditions. A list of suggested subjects is provided. Students who fail the examination must take a corrective course.

The examinations show the consistent inferiority of preparation of junior college graduates. Results from 1949-57 showed that only 13% of Mississippi State Juniors failed, whereas 32% of the graduates of Mississippi junior colleges failed. Soon we will all have to face a similar situation. Mr. Eugene Grewe reported to this conference last year that junior colleges were already preparing 22.5% of college freshmen in 1956. (See the December, 1957, *College Composition and Communication* for his important article "A Teacher Looks at His Professional Status.") His figures showed that junior colleges are expanding eight times faster than liberal arts colleges. When public junior colleges are started, it is often argued that they will provide "terminal education," but an increasing proportion of junior college graduates decide to go on for their degrees. If we are concerned about the quality of American education, we must do our part in improving the standards, the faculty, and the administration of these institutions.

Because of the huge influx of junior college graduates and chiefly because many of our own students who pass Freshman English with grades of "C" or "D" tend to backslide and need further instruction to confirm the abilities which they temporarily developed in Freshman English, should not the practice of requiring a junior proficiency test in composition become part of our national standards?

The Aims of Harvard's General Education A¹

HAROLD C. MARTIN²

I suppose that the ever-harassing problem of freshman composition has suffered as many solutions as any problem of the college curriculum. The fact that there have been so many indicates that none has been particularly successful or at least has not been universally acceptable. It is hardly to be expected, then, that another solution will meet with much wider approval or provide much greater satisfaction either for students or for teachers committed to the course. Perhaps the best that one can hope for is that, abandoning counsels of perfection, one may somehow find the least galling and the richest procedure possible so that neither teacher nor student need be greatly irked and so that each may be in some measure rewarded by insights into the experience of coming-to-know.

The introduction of programs in general education into the college curriculum was itself accompanied by another solution to the problem of freshman composition. That solution was to abandon the traditional course in freshman composition and merge it with elementary courses in the program of general education, requiring that some time in those elementary courses be given to rhetorical matters and that students be required to write regularly.

What was most distinctive about this solution was that it attempted to bring freshman composition to a course having respectable substance rather than to bring respectable substance to a course in freshman composition. Looked at in another way, it was merely a returning to the *status quo ante*, to the early years of American colleges in which the teach-

ing of composition was not thought to be necessary and in which the more or less conventional substitute for such a "required" course was one in elementary logic. Now just as the success of any plan to bring respectable substance to the course in composition depends upon the relevance of the matter introduced, so the success of this attempt to bring freshman composition to courses having respectable substance depended upon the giving of scrupulous and generous attention, in those courses, to the use of language. In an ideal world, one in which college freshmen knew and used their own language moderately well and in which all college teachers were deeply concerned about clear and felicitous expression, I should certainly prefer the latter, integrative, solution. In the world we have, I suspect that scrupulous and generous attention to the use of language by teachers whose principal concern is the history of ideas and institutions or the evolution of scientific method or the development of a literary genre, even were it enough to meet the needs of the students, is more often hoped for than achieved. My suspicion is admittedly based on a few years of work in one program of general education, and I do not pretend that the solution I now propose has universal, or even general, relevance.

In the strong program in general education at Harvard, there seems to me evidence of a need for more direct dealing with the problems which the course in freshman composition is supposed to meet than can adequately be met by making instruction in writing incidental to the study of the humanities or of the social and natural sciences. If a separate course is to be provided for that more direct dealing, however, and if that course is to be part of the whole pro-

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gram in general education, it is clear that the course must subscribe to the aims of general education, which I take to be three: The development of perspective on one's own culture; the development of a sense of the relatedness of all knowledge, and the development of an awareness of self as a being influenced by the past and capable of influencing the present and the future. That is, the separate course must not be satisfied, any more than any other course in the program, to have rich substance. The substance chosen for the course must be such as to help students to achieve some perspective, to emphasize the fact that many of the concerns of human beings are approachable from various directions, and to encourage students to make some direct application of all experience to their own understanding of their place in the world. The distinctive characteristic of such a course is that it is concerned with language not simply as the medium by which a transmission of information takes place but as a phenomenon of particular interest itself. At the same time that it focusses attention on language as a peculiar human activity, it must attempt to preserve those concerns with the general aims of the program in general education.

I suppose that there are several kinds of material and procedure that might suit a separate course in general education so described. One might argue for history of language, another for elementary linguistics, another for theory of communication, and so on. My own preference is for a different content and procedure, one which I believe to be intimately associated with the desires and interests of students at the ages of seventeen and eighteen and one which I think comes close to representing fully their own experience in the use of language.

It is generally agreed today that thought takes place only by means of

some sort of symbolic manipulation. It is also agreed that for most of us it is the symbols which we call words that are most often used in the process of thinking. It is clear enough to anyone who does any writing, however, that word-symbols are not the automatic embodiment of coherent intellectual processes. They seem rather to *give form* to some kind of neural response or complex of neural responses in the brain. A person trying to think about any subject—attempting, that is, to order fragments of experience meaningfully—uses words as his means of doing so. A considerable part of this thinking he may very well perform, as we say, mentally, without spoken or written activity. If the problem is at all complicated, however, or if the thinker is himself conscious of conflict between the fragments of experience which present themselves for ordering, he must turn to some kind of fixed notation in order to work his way out of his problem.

Therefore, it seems to me desirable to teach the student, in these years, to use language first as a tool for discovery, for inquiry about the world and about his reactions to it. In order to do so, he must be taught to regard words as tentative representations of what he has in mind and to expect that they will be helpful to him in focussing ever and ever more closely the fragments of experience which he is attempting to unify and make coherent. If he starts from such a premise, an inadequate sentence is not unsatisfactory because it is one step toward realization. In the actual putting down of words on paper, it is even something more than that because it provides him with a physical entity which he can emend, much as he might rearrange or add to an arrangement of building blocks until he has a structure which satisfies by its correspondence to the mental perceptions by which it was initiated. The precise nature of the cor-

respondance achieved in writing I am not learned enough to describe, but I believe it to be something like that harmony which I. A. Richards has described as the full experience of a poem. Stephen Spender has said that rhyming is of real value to a poet because the search for tonal repetitions often produces words which suggest to the poet possibilities for a dimension in his poem of which he was not consciously aware. The trying-out of words and the setting down of successive sentences, each of which is an attempt to satisfy the mind, seems to me similarly useful to the writer of prose.

Apart from this very practical value, I think that another accrues from taking the attitude toward language which I describe. If the student thinks of his writing as primarily an exploratory process, he is likely to recognize that his first responsibility in the use of language is to himself. Before he worries about transmission, he has an obligation and, hopefully, may feel a desire to achieve the fullest and most accurate satisfaction possible of his own experience of an object or a situation.

When he has come as close as he can to such a satisfaction, he must then face the problem of communication. It is not safe, in my opinion, to assume that even this verbal satisfaction which the student achieves is always, by virtue of its having resolved his confusion, necessarily guaranteed to provide another person with an identical satisfaction. The reason for it has been vividly, though oversimply, shown by Shannon and Wiener's work on communication-theory and by the discussions of semantics so widely disseminated and eagerly accepted in the past few decades. Given students with any intelligence at all and with even a modicum of sophistication about language, it is not difficult to demonstrate that words are chameleons, changing color according to the surface with which

they come into contact. When that has been demonstrated, an argument exists for the second examination of the words one is using to express and convey a thought. If a question may be phrased to which the first attitude toward language is an answer, it might be this: 'How fully and accurately do these words satisfy the mental perceptions I have about x?' A corollary question for this second process would then be: "Will these words provide for my reader an understanding of those perceptions similar to the one I now have?"

Here I undoubtedly appear to elaborate the obvious. If I do so, it is only to make emphatic my belief that, as far as a course in composition within a program of general education is concerned, it is important that the students' responsibility to the truth of his own experience be treated as the only sound reason for his making the effort to communicate at all.

In complex matters, communication is largely persuasive. It persuades another to view an object or situation in a particular light and, perhaps, to begin action on the basis of that view. If the student is allowed, or encouraged, to think of persuasion simply as an act of coercion, without regard to truth as the persuader understands it, he is being most illiberally educated indeed. Exercises in the manipulation of words purely for "effect" like those exercises in slanting so familiar in many popular texts—seem to me to foster not only a cynical attitude towards language but a serious misunderstanding of the whole purpose of writing in liberal education. If it is objected that students need to be protected against the abuse of language by others, I can only reply that I find them already sufficiently wary to guard themselves adequately; and, moreover, that I suspect that what sometimes seems to us blind assent to highly charged and illogical statement is not so blind as it

seems but a genuine assent, of some order, to what the language represents. If it is assent to something irrational or, even, to something evil, the cure is not, I think, to be effected by a simple sensitizing of the student to so-called emotive terms but by the much more laborious process of getting him to know himself and the world intimately, in short, by educating him.

Let me say, before I finish, that I do not by any means think that the two attitudes toward language which I have described follow one another like a cart after a horse or even that they are separate events. For the purpose of description, they must be separated. So far as I am able to discover by experiment, they must also be separated for the purpose of instruction. Lack of time prevents my giving any detailed account here of the procedures by which we try in the freshman composition course at Harvard to develop these attitudes. In

general, I can say that we alternate analysis of text with analysis of experience for the first step, and analysis of text with experiment in expression for the second. Our materials are varied—*belles lettres*, history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, physics, and so on—because we think that variety best satisfies the diverse interests of our students and the procedures we use. Neither our procedures nor our materials, I know very well, are particularly unusual. Nor do I mean to suggest that in the five years of our groping toward the kind of formulation I have described here we have found a fully satisfactory solution for freshman composition even in our own program. I do think that we have developed a reasonably successful role for this course in the whole program of general education, and the considerable satisfaction we now find in our work seems to me some warrant for our feeling that, if not the best, this is at least not the worst of all possible solutions.

Connotation in Dictionary Definition¹

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In selecting and writing his definitions, the lexicographer is of course fully aware that he is not actually recording the "meaning" of a particular word, but that he is merely trying to suggest, within the available space, as many of the aspects of the thing defined as will recall it to the reader or will allow him to form an idea of it in his mind. That is to say, a dictionary definition such as "a tool or apparatus for boring holes in wood, metal, stone, etc." does not actually describe any single, particular device. It might suggest a hand drill or a power drill or a dentist's device for evok-

ing exquisite pain, but it does in any case denote, or explicitly mark out, that class of objects to which English speakers have assigned the generic word *drill*. Of course, the more restricted the class, or the fewer the possible number of referents, the more precise the denotation. A proper name is the most restrictive of all. The term *William Shakespeare* will probably suggest the author of a number of enduring plays and poems. Or, if your interests incline in a somewhat different direction, it might recall a skillful member of the Yale backfield in the late thirties. But it will probably have no other "meaning" for most people.

The lexicographer is primarily concerned with pinpointing the possible de-

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notations of a word, and there are those who believe that this is all he can or does do with the "meanings" of words. Such a notion is an erroneous one. The editor is also aware that what the word suggests, that is its connotation, can be fully as important as what it denotes, for he knows that words are not only grammatical tools and symbols, but that they embody as well as ensemble of notions, concepts, and psychological reactions. A politician and a statesman may both be concerned with carrying out the affairs of government, but unless the reader or user of these terms understands that the word *politician* is frequently used in a derogatory sense, with implications of seeking personal or partisan gain, scheming, opportunism, etc., and that *statesman* suggests able, far-seeing, principled conduct of public affairs, he cannot have the full meanings of these words. The lexicographer knows clearly in such a case that his responsibility does not end with recording the denotation of these words. It occurs to me in passing that age must be the catalyst that invariably transforms the politician into a statesman. We seem to be burdened with an unconscionable number of elder statesmen, but I have yet to hear of an elder politician.

All words, with the possible exception of the particles, convey connotative notions of one sort or another. Very often these connotations are of a highly personal order. To the child who first becomes aware of polka dots as the embellishment of his mother's silk dress, the term *polka dot* may thereafter evoke the sensation of soft silkiness. Some words may have group, in addition to individual, suggestiveness; that is, their connotations may be sharply divided into opposing camps depending on whether the idea denoted is favorably or unfavorably received by the listener. Emotion-charged terms such as *integration*, *socialism*, and, on another level, *rock and*

roll offer extreme examples of violently disparate connotation. It is clear that such individual or group reactions cannot be taken into account by dictionaries. The editor of a dictionary, and especially of a college desk dictionary, is constantly buffeted between the Scylla of excessive terseness and the Charybdis of an unwieldy, too expensive volume.

Other terms, however, may over a period of time acquire specific connotations that are sufficiently widespread to warrant recognition and recording by the lexicographer. The word *propaganda*, which until quite recently meant essentially "any systematic, widespread, deliberate indoctrination or plan for such indoctrination" today requires an annotation like the one in the *New World*: "now often used in a derogatory sense, connoting deception or distortion."

The line of demarcation between the denotative and connotative aspects of a word is not always clearly drawn. Frequently the elements blend and are merged into a single descriptive statement that serves as the dictionary definition. The lexicographer need not feel undue concern where this occurs naturally and easily. The problems of judgment and selection enter where the division is sharp and easily recognized. Here the editor must decide whether the exigencies of space will allow the extra connotative note that could round out the meaning of the term.

In addition to the explicit note, there are other devices used by dictionaries to suggest the connotative aspects of words. In a very large sense, the usage labels attached to many terms and senses constitute one such device. It is one thing to know that *haughty* can mean "lofty or noble," but unless one also knows that this sense is regarded as archaic, he may, if he uses it innocently in normal conversation, find himself misunderstood. In the same way it is only proper that a college dictionary record the word *hight*,

meaning "named or called," but unless this too is labeled *Archaic*, the freshman who appropriates this term into his active vocabulary may find himself the victim of condescending smiles. The same situation would apply to words and meanings labeled "obsolete" or "colloquial" or "slang" or "British." Similarly, after some meanings, the dictionary may have a note stating that the word is used ironically (as *pretty*, meaning "fine or good" in a *pretty mess*) or familiarly or vulgarly or hyperbolically or as a counterword of wide application (e.g., *nice*, used as a generalized term of approval). Thus we can see that usage labels serve not only to nail down the period or level to which a term properly belongs, but also to suggest the flavor or odor which the term may emit in its context. This, too, is connotative.

To digress for a moment, one of the suggested topics for discussion today concerns the method used to determine the usage levels for words and meanings. The answer should be obvious, but it may nevertheless bear statement. Such determinations are largely informed opinions, based on the accumulated evidence of the chronology, frequency, and distribution of citations, aided by the ear of the editor himself and by the suggestions of linguistic consultants. Language is not a static thing and words wander casually and easily from one level of usage to another over a period of time. The business of keeping up with these changes is just one of the continuous problems of lexicography.

But to return to my main topic. Sometimes the lexicographer must include some of the connotative affects of a word if only to illuminate its normal extensions in meaning. For example, the staff of our dictionary recently decided that although the word *jungle* denotes most simply "land covered with dense growth of trees, tall vegetation, vines, etc., typically in tropical regions," we shall be re-

quired to add the connotative information that jungles are generally inhabited by predatory beasts, so that the extended meaning of this word that has resulted in such Hollywoodisms as *asphalt jungle* and *blackboard jungle* might be properly understood.

Another word recently recorded by the *New World* is *exurbanite*, the coinage of A. C. Spector. At its most elemental level, this word refers to "a person of the upper middle class who lives in the semirural areas beyond the suburbs but who works in the metropolis, especially in the communications fields, as in advertising, publishing, the theater, etc." That is essentially all the word "means." But unless we remark also that "exurbanites are regarded as conforming to social and cultural patterns as standardized as those of suburban life," Mr. Spector's whole point in writing the book—and coining the word—is lost. And for *suburban*, too, we must have a note stating that this word variously connotes a combination of urban and rural features, middle-class conservatism, etc., since the word today is as frequently used for its connotative elements as for its explicit denotation.

A class of words that can and should receive explanatory notes in dictionaries concerning their suggestive tones are the terms of racial and ethnic opprobrium. The lexicographer, we feel, has the moral responsibility to inform the dictionary user that if he persists in using these terms he does so today, in the view of most cultivated people, only by jeopardizing his respectability and good taste.

Still another area in which the dictionary can convey connotation is in the little paragraph labeled "Synonymy" that follows many words of general vocabulary. These paragraphs serving to discriminate among various closely related words are as often concerned with the suggestive differences between these various terms as they are with the deno-

tative differences. Take, for instance, the group *desire*, *wish*, *want*, and *crave*. All of these words, collectively, denote a strong longing or yearning, and within the definitions proper for these words it seems pertinent to employ the same or similar wording, often even using one or more of these terms as an approximate synonym for another. But within the synonymy it is possible to offer the extended nuances that make each of these more precisely appropriate in a particular context. The paragraph reads: "*desire*, generally interchangeable with the other words here in the sense of to long for, stresses intensity or ardor (to *desire* success); *wish* is not as strong a term as *desire* and has special application when an unrealizable longing is meant (he *wished* summer were here); *want*, specifically suggesting a longing for something lacking or needed, generally is a more informal equivalent of *wish* (she *wants*, or *wishes*, to go with us); *crave* suggests desire to gratify a physical appetite or an urgent need (to *crave* affection)."

Frequently where specific explanation must be forgone because of lack of space, connotation can be implied through the judicious use of illustrative examples. The discerning freshman soon learns that the phrases or sentences demonstrating the word in action serve not only to elaborate the definition, but often through context suggest the special nuances that the word has acquired in usage. For example, the word *ramble*, in

one sense, might be defined: "to grow or spread in all directions." This clearly gives the proper denotation of one use of *ramble*. But if we add the illustrative "as, vines *rambled* over the fence," the graphic image conjured up by the example supplies suggestive tones that may help the dictionary user focus the true "meaning" of the word. Often the etymology will supply an interesting sidelight that can bring a flash of understanding to the student. To know that *supercilious* refers ultimately to raised eyebrows or that *sarcasm* derives from a Greek verb meaning "to tear flesh like dogs" is to have an additional insight into the subtle shades suggested by these words.

I have been speaking of the ways in which dictionaries can and frequently do supply the connotations that are essential to a proper grasp of meaning. But I do not mean to imply satisfaction with the extent to which these techniques have been carried out in existing dictionaries. It is the conviction of our staff that the use of these devices should be extended still further. The chief problem, of course, is one of space. But I believe that a way will be found, perhaps by a reapportionment of the space allotted to the various lexicographical elements and by securing the approval of the user of dictionaries to such a reapportionment. For in our opinion it is precisely the inclusion of connotation in dictionary definitions that can lend precision to the student's speech and art to his writing.

Does your experience and thinking confirm or deny the validity of what you read in CCC? Why not write to the Editor, in a form suitable for publication in the Staff Room Interchange.

Outside Pressures

JESS STEIN¹

It will not come as news to anyone in this room, I am sure, that an unprecedented and truly phenomenal number of copies of dictionaries are in existence today. You will note that I said, "in existence" and not "in use." The increase of literacy, the improvement of our book buying habits, the development of mass-printing techniques—these and other factors have made it possible now for us to find a dictionary in almost every school-room, almost every home, almost every office. Today the dictionary has become one of the three basic books, the others being the Bible and Shakespeare. Unfortunately, the dictionary is often invested with greater authority than the Bible and with greater omniscience than Shakespeare.

One consequence of this delightful popularity of dictionaries in the United States is the growth of many pressures which attempt to intrude upon the work of the lexicographer. There has, of course, always been the pressure of those who, with desperate conviction, regard dictionaries as the last haven of certainty in a bewildering world. The dictionary is, for them, a sacred vault in which human wisdom is stored and to them no voice is more alphabetically definitive than that of the dictionary editor.

I am not referring here, of course, to people who report possible errors in a dictionary or who direct attention to omissions or oversights of any kind. They are the ones who, as a rule, seem to show the most charitable understanding of human frailty in a lexicographer.

The pressures I want to deal with here are those which, as I said, intrude upon the work of the dictionary-maker. A dictionary, because it is widely owned and because it is regarded by many as a final

court of appeal, often becomes an extremely important piece of evidence in many kinds of legal action. It often becomes the place in which special groups seek to have definitions expressed only from the viewpoints they approve. The dictionary editor must, therefore, constantly guard against mistaking "pressure" for "legitimate correction." The task would be simplified if one could divide correspondents into "good guys" and "bad guys," but the fact is that in practically all cases the correspondent appears to be completely sincere and well-meaning.

The pressures that intrude upon the lexicographer are interesting, not only because they are persistent problems in lexicography, but because they reflect a fascinating set of attitudes toward dictionaries and toward language.

We can pass quickly over the "innocents." These include, for example, people who fail to win a word contest because some extremely rare word was not in the dictionary they own; they usually write bitter and blistering letters, but they are generally not difficult. I remember having trouble in only one instance, and that was when a man who had lost in a contest demanded that we pay him his prize money because we did not happen to have one of the very rare words involved in the solution. Among the "innocents" too are the people who want to identify themselves—for posterity, I take it—with a word they coined and have gained some acceptance for. Not long ago, for example, we received a letter from a doctor who had devised a special surgical technique and who clearly felt that the mere inclusion of the word he had coined for this technique would help gain acceptance for the technique itself. And then there are the ones who coin words—words which are often remark-

¹Editor, *American College Dictionary*

ably ingenious and often words which fill some need—and who submit these to the dictionary in the same way that one would submit an article to the *Atlantic Monthly*.

But now to the serious pressures. Without question, the most skillful and the most persistent pressure upon the lexicographer comes from the owners of trademarks. The trademark—*Coca Cola*, *Presto*, *Band-Aid*, *Jello*, *Dacron*, *Vaseline*, *Thermos*, *Lucky Strikes*, *Old Granddad*, and so on—is one of the most valuable assets a company owns. According to Henry Link of the Psychological Corporation, about 95% of the people in the United States buy according to brand or trademark. In many cases, products are practically identical and the well-advertised trademark is often the only feature that distinguishes the product of one manufacturer from that of another. To put it in dollar terms, Adolph Zukor once said that the name *Paramount* in the film industry, as the trademark of a specific company, was worth more than \$15,000,000; and I have been told that when the firm producing *Maxwell House Coffee* was sold, most of the price of \$43,000,000 was paid for the name itself. To protect a trademark, therefore, a company will do everything in its power. In a surprisingly large number of American firms, special individuals and special staffs have as their main job policing for any acts which may jeopardize their trademarks, protesting them, and, if necessary, instituting legal proceedings. For example, the Coca-Cola Company, in defense of its trademarks *Coca Cola* and *Coke* has averaged one lawsuit every week of the year during the past forty years.

Under the Lanham Act of 1946, the trademark owner must be unceasingly vigilant because he may lose his right to a trademark simply by default. He is obliged by this Act to refuse to tolerate any infringing or generic use of his mark.

Thus, if a modern author refers to any electric refrigerator as a "frigidaire," both he and the publisher are certain to get a letter of protest. The same would be true of the use of "kodak" to refer to any camera, of "victrola" to refer to any phonograph, of "Kleenex" to refer to any disposable paper handkerchief, and so on. The moment a trademark achieves considerable currency as a generic term rather than as a mark that identifies the product of a specific company, the courts may declare that trademark to be a part of the publicly-owned English language. It was because of widespread generic use, primarily, that such words as *cellophane*, *aspirin*, *shredded wheat*, *linoleum*, *dry ice*, *milk of magnesia*, *vichy*, and *escalator*—all of them originally trademarks—were lost as the exclusive marks of individual companies.

Now, trademarks are all around us and they are a part of our everyday language. We use them, from the standpoint of trademark attorneys, "correctly" some of the time and "incorrectly" some of the time. From the viewpoint of the trademark owner, the trademark is, in effect, a piece of private property: he staked it out, he invested in it, and he has the right to prosecute trespassers. And remember that the vocabulary of trademarks is an immense one. There are, I am told, well over 600,000 trademarks registered in the United States Patent Office. This is greater, I believe, than the number of entries claimed by the largest of our unabridged dictionaries.

Now, what should the lexicographer do when instances of generic use are frequent enough to warrant inclusion? What shall we do when citation slips come through for the word *dictaphone* such as "On his office desk there was a soundscribe (a sort of dictaphone machine)." This is an actual case in which the trademark, *Dictaphone*, is being used as a generic term for a dictating

machine. Shall we take upon ourselves the decision that generic use of the trademark *Dictaphone* has reached the point at which inclusion of a separate definition is warranted? In this specific citation, incidentally, there must have been quite a scene at the offices of the Sound-scriber Company when they discovered they were being identified as a "kind of dictaphone machine." And there must have been wild agitation at the offices of the Dictaphone Company when they discovered that their trademark was being used generically to describe a competitor's machine.

Or, take a word, a trademark, like *Technicolor*. When Sterling North, in reviewing a book, described it as "a nightmare in pale green technicolor" he was promptly reproached by the attorneys for the Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation, who denied that *their* word, "Technicolor," could "correctly" be used in such a context. When the *New York Times Magazine*, about a year ago, described the General Motors Technical Center as "as campus in Technicolor," it was promptly reprimanded and a few weeks later the *Magazine* inserted a note that it regretted its use of "Technicolor." I have a collection of several dozen copies of letters to the Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation apologizing for the generic use of the term and promising to be more careful in the future. These letters are from such publications as *This Week Magazine*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Reader's Digest*, *Mademoiselle*, *Life*, *Time*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Avon Publishing Company*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *U. S. Government Printing Office*, the *New York World Telegram*, *W. W. Norton & Co.*, the *Boston Post*, *Houghton Mifflin*, *Look*, *Harper & Brothers*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*. The very volume of apologies itself demonstrates considerable tendency to use *Technicolor* as a generic term.

The problem, then, for the dictionary editor is whether to record the use of *technicolor* in senses other than that of the trademark. And, if so, should it be marked "incorrect" as the trademark owners would prefer? And shall we do as they suggest: Capitalize the word (even though in actual usage it does not appear capitalized)? Some of us have tried to solve this problem by placing a statement at the front of the dictionary to the effect that inclusion of a word does not necessarily mean that it is or is not a registered trademark. But the fact is that this has not cleared up the dilemma: we want to represent actual usage but, in doing so, we do not want to hurt anyone's legitimate rights. We have still to find a way of doing an accurate job on trademarks in the dictionary which will be fully acceptable to trademark owners.

The dictionary is a target, too, of the publicity and public relations staffs of companies. For example, a stove company has sent us reams of material on "micro-wave cooking," a process in which they are particularly interested. The United Press Association has volunteered material for the entry of *United Press*. The National Serigraph Society has urged upon us the inclusion of *serigraph*, *serigrapher*, and *serigraphy*. CARE, the organization which sends money and food abroad, once asked whether we would participate in the celebration of their 11th anniversary by including their name in the dictionary. The American Accordion Association submitted a definition of *accordion* which they preferred from their viewpoint. Alex Osborne, the advertising man who introduced the practice of brainstorm sessions, did not hesitate to suggest that *brainstorming* (in the meaning he applies to it) should now be in the dictionary. The public relations man for the trailer coach industry and for the coffee industry is among the most knowing. In suggesting the inclusion of such entries as *trailer coach*, *trail-*

er park, and a coffee (in the sense of a gathering similar to a tea party: "We are planning a coffee next Tuesday"), he helpfully provided a carefully assembled batch of citation slips prepared in good lexicographic manner. Here is an example of this sort of special-interest letter; it is from the Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

Dear Sir:

We would like to propose the word *CinemaScope* for inclusion in forthcoming editions or "new word" sections of your dictionaries.

It is our sincere belief that the term adds a new entity to the language, referring as it does to a new dimensional photographic process developed by Twentieth Century-Fox. *CinemaScope* is likewise an adjective, applied to specific motion pictures, cameras, lenses, screens, and allied materials and techniques of a cinematic nature.

In order that you may more fully assess the nature of *CinemaScope* and thereby understand both its definition and applications, basic descriptive material has been enclosed.

Finally, there are the groups with special viewpoints. Religious groups which have split will quite often protest each other's definition. Professional groups such as the National Chiropractors Association, the National Association of Chiropractists, and the Association of Podiatrists will take issue with definitions which do not define their professions in terms of the scope and status they believe they should have. Political groups, too, make themselves clearly heard to a lexicographer. When the ACD added McCarthyism in 1954, including definitions covering use of this word by pros, antis, and middle-of-the roaders, we were accused of political coloration from one end of the spectrum to the other. Another example of political pressure groups involves such entries as *Lithu-*

ania, *Latvia*, and *Estonia*. Shall we, in defining these entries, take the realistic position that they are now part of Soviet Russia even though our State Department does not recognize this annexation? To what extent do we harm the cause of friendly governments-in-exile by declining to define such annexed nations as though they were actually free and independent?

This leads me to a final example I would like to mention. And the issue here is whether the demands of good citizenship take precedence over the demands of good lexicography. There is, as you know, a definition of the word *Turk*, meaning a "cruel, barbarous, or tyrannical person." Shortly after the ACD appeared, we received a diplomatically worded off-the-record letter from a major official of the Department of State suggesting that the inclusion of this derogatory definition was, because of the sale of the ACD in Turkey, injurious to the development of good international relations in a vital and sensitive part of the world. Our problem was, as I said, the problem of whether to act in keeping with this overwhelmingly flattering estimate of our influence or whether to abide by our decision that the dictionary is a mirror of the language and that its contents are not to be influenced by non-lexicographic pressures. After considerable argument, we made our decision; but I do not think I will reveal it here, because I believe that, no matter which way we had decided, I would find half of you in disagreement.

I do so remembering that Dr. Samuel Johnson, in the preface to his dictionary two centuries ago, said, "Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach."

Hugh Blair as an Analyzer of English Prose Style

EDWARD P. J. CORBETT¹

That Dr. Hugh Blair has to be identified for a modern audience—even for students of English language and literature—is a sobering lesson in the vagaries of fame. There was a time when Hugh Blair was as well known and as much discussed as Dr. Samuel Johnson, his esteemed and influential contemporary. In the literary renaissance that took place in Edinburgh, that “Athens of the North,” in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Blair was recognized as the leader of a group that included such distinguished men as Adam Smith, David Hume, James Boswell, William Robertson, James Macpherson, and Robert Burns. Blair was one of the founders, in 1755, of the abortive *Edinburgh Review*; he was the sixth in the line of modern editors of Shakespeare, his edition of 1753 coming between Warburton’s (1747) and Johnson’s (1765); he was a famous preacher at the fashionable St. Giles Church in Edinburgh, and his six volumes of sermons were widely read in Great Britain and America; and he was a zealous promoter of Macpherson’s Ossian “translations” and Burns’s lyric poems.

All of these activities made Blair the *arbiter elegantiarum* in Edinburgh circles, but it was as a teacher of rhetoric that Blair achieved his greatest fame and influence. In 1759 Blair began his series of lectures on rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh, and in 1763 he was commissioned by George III as the first Regius Professor of Rhetoric at that university. Perhaps the most distinguished successor to this Chair, which still exists at Edinburgh, was George Saintsbury. For twenty-four years after his original

appointment, Blair delivered his lectures to packed classrooms.[†] In 1783, largely because he had discovered his lectures circulating freely in manuscript copies that his students had made in class, Blair published his lectures under the title *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.

The wide circulation of this text attests to its great popularity.² There were over fifty editions of the *Lectures*, complete or abridged, before 1835, and complete editions of the *Lectures* continued to be published as late as 1873. The lectures were translated into French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. Blair’s text was adopted by several schools in Great Britain soon after publication, and in America between 1785 and 1835 it was adopted by such colleges as Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Brown, Middlebury, Williams, and Amherst. In the face of such evidence of popularity we are not surprised to find Morris Croll testifying in 1916 that “the accepted rhetorical teacher, at least in America, until thirty or forty years ago was Hugh Blair” or to hear William Charvat maintaining that Blair’s *Lectures* was a book “which half the educated English-speaking world studied.”³

The eclipse of Blair’s fame coincides with the general decline of interest in the old-fashioned rhetorical tradition. Archbishop Whately’s *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) was perhaps the only rhetoric book after Blair’s that enjoyed wide prestige and an international sale. Nothing like the rhetorical training that once prevailed in English and American schools now exists. Composition courses today, bravely but inaccurately dubbed

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[†]See end of article for footnotes.

"Rhetoric," are a considerably watered-down version of the rhetoric courses of former years. Rhetoric has gone the way of the other good things—classical languages, mathematics, geography—that once figured so prominently in the curricula of the schools. If Blair's name is no longer mentioned in our classrooms, what rhetorician's name is heard?

There is evidence today, however, of a resurgence of interest, at least in academic circles, in classical rhetoric. An increasing number of articles which treat of some phase of rhetoric are appearing each year in the scholarly journals. If this interest in rhetoric continues to gain momentum, Blair's name and his textbook may again assume their former prominence. But even if the current interest in the rhetorical tradition sputters out, modern teachers of English might find in texts like Blair's a good deal that is helpful to them in their own teaching.

One technique that present-day teachers of English might find particularly useful is Blair's method of analyzing prose style. Not many of us spend much time on prose style, mainly because we have never evolved a method for such an analysis. Thanks to the New Critics, we do have methods for discussing the formal aspects of poetry. But when we come to prose selections in our literature or composition courses, we characterize the style of the writer under consideration with such generalized labels as "forceful," "simple," "urbane," "laconic," "clean," "flowing," "journalistic," "organ-toned," and then pass quickly on to a discussion of the ideas in the prose selection. As a result of our lack of a method for discussing prose style, we find ourselves dealing almost exclusively with "matter" when we study prose in our classes. But we need not throw up our hands in a gesture of resignation or despair. The New Criticism, after all, has been evolved from an application of

rhetorical methods and terminology to an analysis of poetry. There is no reason why these same techniques could not be employed in the analysis of prose style. Now is the time for Dr. Hugh Blair to come to the aid of his party.

Hugh Blair devoted fifteen of his lectures to the *elocutio* part of rhetoric. Not only did Blair devote more lectures to style than to any other part of rhetoric, but he also proved to be at his most perceptive and most practical when dealing with this aspect of written discourse. Modern teachers of English will find much in these lectures that amplifies or supplements the expositions they get in twentieth-century composition texts. They may not find much that is original in Blair's theoretical discussion of style, but they will find that Blair's sensible and trustworthy eclecticism has brought together in one place all the best precepts from the classical, the French, and the Scottish rhetoricians. In Lectures X to XIX, they will find "the best that is known and thought in the world" about such matters as the choice of words, the collocation of words, the harmony of sentences, the figures of speech, the general characters of style, and the directions for forming a proper style. If nothing else, these lectures would give the teacher the terminology for discussing prose style.

The five lectures (XX-XXIV), however, in which Blair gives a detailed analysis of whole prose essays may prove to be the most useful essays for modern teachers of English. It is here that Blair makes a unique contribution to English studies. I know of nothing else in English criticism quite like these analyses of Blair's. Other critics have analyzed isolated sentences and passages for style. But no one in English before Blair and scarcely anyone since, as far as I have been able to determine, has taken entire essays and subjected them to a sentence-by-sentence analysis.

To harvest whatever fruit there is in Blair's technique one would have to read the whole of the five lectures in which Blair analyzes Nos. 411, 412, 413, and 414 of Addison's *Spectator Papers* and a section of Swift's "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue." What I intend to do in this paper is to quote a few representative passages from the lectures on Addison's style. My hope is that these passages will not only illustrate Blair's method but will also so pique the interest of the reader that he will be prompted to go directly to Blair for the full treatment. Fortunately, Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* is one of those books, like Taine's *History of English Literature*, that was published in so many editions that copies of it are readily available in most secondhand bookshops and college libraries.

Before quoting the representative passages, I should apprise the reader of some of Blair's attitudes toward style in general and toward Addison's style in particular. For Blair—as for his idol Quintilian—the first essential of a good style is clearness or, to use the Latin term, perspicuity. The pre-eminence of clarity colors all of Blair's observations on style. All other elements of style—euphony, rhythm, emphasis, ornament—must be sacrificed where the clarity of the sentence is in jeopardy. Perspicuity is secured, first of all, by a choice of words with a view to purity, propriety, and precision; secondly, by the collocation of words with a view to purity, propriety, and precision; secondly, by the collocation of words with a view to unequivocal syntax, unity, and forcefulness. Blair's insistence on the supremacy of lucidity needs to be pointed out because it accounts for most of his strictures on Addison's style. For all its virtues, Addison's style, according to Blair, is "not strictly accurate." Time and time again, Blair finds in Addison instances

of misplaced modifiers, faulty reference of pronoun, illogical use of conjunctions, faulty comparisons, imprecise diction—all of these being faults that impair the clarity of the style.

Blair hastens to assure his readers, however, that the occasional flaws he finds in Addison's writings do not seriously minimize his esteem of Addison's style as a whole. Although Blair was a member of the beauty-blemish school of criticism, he felt that it was a mistake "to estimate an author's style on the whole by some passage in his writings which chances to be composed in a careless manner." The merit of a writer must be judged by "the general cast or complexion of the style." And when Addison was judged by the general cast of his style, he was, in Blair's view, "the safest model" for his students to follow. Blair had formed his own delightful style in much the same manner as Benjamin Franklin had formed his. Blair tells us in Lecture XIX that having read several of the *Spectator Papers* when he was a young man,

I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.

In a footnote in Lecture XXI, Blair tells us why and how these analyses of Addison's style came to be composed. He found his Scottish students growing self-conscious about their ordinary spoken language which differed so noticeably from that used by the best English authors.

Hence it occurred to me, [Blair says,] as a proper method of correcting any peculiarities of dialect, to direct students

of eloquence to analyze and examine, with particular attention, the structure of Mr. Addison's sentences. Those papers of the *Spectator*, which are the subject of the following lectures, were accordingly given out in exercise to students, to be thus examined and analyzed; and several of the observations which follow, both on the beauties and blemishes of this author, were suggested by the observations given to me in consequence of the exercises prescribed.

So it would seem that these analyses developed over the course of the years during which Blair was delivering his public lectures and that in their printed form they represent the joint efforts of teacher and pupil.

In the close examination of the first four essays "On the Pleasures of the Imagination," Blair's method in general is to quote each sentence in turn, to point out the merits and defects of the sentence, and, where the sentence is radically faulty, to suggest a revised version of the sentence. His comments concern sometimes the diction, sometimes the syntax, sometimes the harmony of the sentence, sometimes the propriety of the figures of speech, sometimes the unity, coherence, and emphasis within or between the sentences. Occasionally throughout these lectures, Blair apologizes for the tedious minuteness and the subtle cavilling of the analyses. While it is true that it is exceedingly trying to take in these four lectures at a single sitting, the reader should remember that Blair's students sat through only one of these lectures at a time, that they themselves had carefully analyzed the essays before coming to class, and that they had Addison's essay open before them as Blair read off his observations. If a teacher today were to adopt such a system, the ideal procedure, it seems to me, would be to have the student come to class with each sentence of the essay under study written out on a separate sheet of loose-leaf paper. The student would then have plenty of space in which

to write out his own and his instructor's observations and revisions.

Let us turn now to a few representative quotations. I will quote first a passage that has always been a special favorite of mine because this passage has always struck me as a brilliant instance of what can be done with those little function words which we tend to neglect in our discussion of style. Function words—articles, conjunctions, prepositions—were always important for Blair because he felt that they were the hinges upon which successful sentences turned. Let us see what he does with the article *the* in the first sentence of No. 411 of the *Spectator*. Addison's sentence reads as follows: "Our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses." Here is Blair's commentary on that sentence:

He might have said, "Our sight is the most perfect and the most delightful." But he had judged better in omitting to repeat the article *the*. For the repetition of it is proper chiefly when we intend to point out the objects of which we speak, as distinguished from, or contrasted with, each other, and when we want that the reader's attention should rest on that distinction. For instance, had Mr. Addison intended to say that our sight is at once the most *delightful* and the most *useful* of all our senses, the article might then have been repeated with propriety, as a clear and strong distinction would have been conveyed. But as between *perfect* and *delightful* there is less contrast, there was no occasion for such repetition. It would have had no other effect but to add a word unnecessarily to the sentence. (Lecture XX).

The reader can decide for himself whether this criticism is an instance of straining at a gnat or an instance of a jealous concern for precision and economy.

The very next sentence of the same essay reads as follows: "It fills the mind with the largest variety of ideas, converses with its objects at the greatest distance, and continues the longest in action, without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments." Blair spends

almost a page showing how this sentence comprises "almost all the properties of a perfect sentence." Let us look only at what Blair has to say about the harmony of the sentence:

Observe, too, the music of the period; consisting of three members, each of which, agreeable to a rule I formerly mentioned, grows and rises above the other in sound, till the sentence is conducted at last to one of the most melodious closes which our language admits: *without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments.* Enjoyments is a word of length and dignity, exceedingly proper for a close which is designed to be a musical one. The harmony is the more happy, as this disposition of the members of the period which suits the sound so well is no less just and proper with respect to the sense. It follows the order of nature. First, we have the variety of object mentioned, which sight furnishes to the mind; next, we have the action of sight on those objects; and lastly, we have the time and continuance of its action. No order could be more natural and happy. (Lecture XX)

Here is another sentence from No. 411: "I therefore thought it necessary to fix and determine the notion of these two words, as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my following speculations, that the reader may conceive rightly what is the subject which I proceed upon." After spending a paragraph discussing Addison's nice sense of the distinction between the apparently synonymous words *fix* and *determine*, Blair goes on to comment on some of the infelicities of the sentence:

The notion of these words is somewhat of a harsh phrase, at least not so commonly used as the meaning of these words;—as I intend to make use of them in the thread of my speculations; this is plainly faulty. A sort of metaphor is improperly mixed with words in the literal sense. He might very well have said, as I intend to make use of them in my following speculations. This was plain language; but if he chose to borrow an allusion from thread, that allusion ought to have been supported; for there is no consistency in making use of them in the thread of speculations; and,

indeed, in expressing any thing so simple and familiar as this is, plain language is always to be preferred to metaphorical—the subject which I proceed upon is an ungraceful close of a sentence; better, the subject upon which I proceed.

The temptation is to go on multiplying examples, especially since Blair is at his best in some of his more extended analyses. But by this time the reader has probably had enough to enable him to decide whether he wants to investigate Blair further or to ignore him completely. In any case, enough examples have been given to show that Blair's expositions are sensible, lucid, concrete, and pointed. Certainly, no special stock of jargon is needed for such examinations; the teacher can proceed to such analyses with his present inventory of taste, good sense, and stylistic and grammatical knowledge.

Blair's technique for analyzing prose style perhaps needs to be pieced out with statistical studies like those that Warner Taylor and W. K. Wimsatt have made of Dr. Johnson's style. Maybe sound generalizations about an author's style cannot be made until we have tabulated such things as the pedigree and syllabic texture of a writer's diction, the length of his sentences, the grammatical and rhetorical variety of his sentences, the occurrences of structural devices like parallelism, antithesis, and chiasmus, and the density of his figurative language. But Blair's kind of analysis, limited as it is, can lead inductively to generalizations too, as Blair shows us in the middle of Lecture XIX where he characterizes Addison's style in a long paragraph.

If Blair's method proves to be inadequate for our purposes, it may serve at least to point the way to the development of an analytical technique that will supply a real need in our composition and literature classes.

²The enrollment in Blair's classes sometimes ran as high as 150 students, and the average attendance was some fifty to sixty students. That the popularity of his lecture was not just the result of a revived interest in rhetoric is evident from the fact that when William Greenfield, Blair's successor, took over the classes in 1784, the size of the class immediately dwindled to twenty or less.—See Alexander Grant, *The Story of the University of Edinburgh During its first Three Hundred Years* (London, 1884), I, 350 and 358-359; and Robert M. Schmitz, *Hugh Blair* (New York, 1948), p. 63.

³Two excellent articles exploring the reasons for Blair's popularity have been published by Douglas Ehmingier and James Golden: "The Intrinsic Sources of Blair's Popularity," *Southern Speech Journal*, XXI (1955), 12-30; "The Extrinsic Sources of Blair's Popularity," *Southern Speech Journal*, XXII (1956), 16-32.

⁴John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and Euphues and His England*, ed. Morris William Croll and Harry Clemons (New York, 1916), p. lxiii; William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810-1835* (Philadelphia, 1936), p. 44.

NSSC News

In the winter issue of *The Journal of Communication* appeared "The Background and Self-Picture of Good and Poor Writers." This is part of a larger undertaking entitled "The Psychological Characteristics of Poor Writers" being carried on by A. M. Barch, Department of Psychology; and R. L. Wright, Communication Skills, Michigan State University. It is concerned primarily with the self-picture of students of low and high writing ability and the background behavior patterns and attitudes of such students.

Part of the data resulted from questionnaires designed and administered in 1956-57 to 123 students from Communication Skills enriched sections and 182 students from the Writing Improvement Service.

Incomplete results showed a number of responses of interest to teachers of English. A few of these responses follow:

"Poor writers are more apt to see themselves as suffering from these difficulties in writing: inadequate punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling. Good writers, on the other hand, worry more about organization, not having anything to say, not being specific, having no clear purpose in mind before starting to write and not being direct and to the point."

"A very small percentage of either

group characterized their high school English teachers as being poor. As might be expected, 52.7% of the good writers remember their high school English teachers as the best teachers they have ever had; 25.5% of the poor writers say the same."

"Poor writers are unable to recognize various levels of writing proficiency. One paper generally looks about as good to them as does another. Good writers have little trouble here. Both groups seem unwilling to face the fact that any composition may be unacceptable or to assign letter grades below C to any student effort."

Barch and Wright summarize their findings as follows:

"Most students in the sample have high regard for their high school English teachers, but believe the courses themselves could be more stimulating. Poor writers are not convinced that such courses are practical, helpful, or worthwhile."

"Students report that they have written few compositions while in high school and that extra help and interest went to the good rather than to the poor writers. Poor writers are often numbered among those who have had fewer than four years of high school English or those who have stayed out of school for at least a year."

"Poor writers think of their writing problems as mechanical and graphic; good writers see need for improvement in forming concepts and expressing relationships."

Also in the winter issue of the NSSC *Journal* Eugene S. Wright, Department of Rhetoric, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota, reported on a listening contest held at that institution. The idea for an effective listening contest was first advanced by Dr. Ralph G. Nichols, Chairman of the Committee on Listening Comprehension for the NSSC in an article which appeared in *School Activities* for April, 1950.

Here are the results of the contest:

"The top contestant missed seven out

of the 50 questions for a percentage of 86. Second and third places were shared by the next two students who had missed ten questions each for identical scores of 80. The remaining scores ranged to 44. Extensive experience in checking listening comprehension reveals that the average college listener tends to fall somewhere between 60 and 70 percent in his comprehension of general information. Judging by these standards, the top three performers had demonstrated a superiority in listening performance."

Teachers interested in experimenting with a listening contest can get some helpful suggestions from Mr. Wright's article.

Anne McGurk

The Sentence-Environment Vocabulary Test

R. DONALD CAIN¹

So many persons—students, and applicants for many sorts of positions—are weighed every year upon the scales furnished by the various forms of vocabulary test, that efforts to perfect the time-honored kinds, or devise new ones, are certainly in order. Such new or bettered instruments might well be widely useful in general vocabulary study and teaching.

Frederic Osenburg's "qualitative vocabulary test," explained in *College English*, November, 1956, represents a positive advance in refinement of the multiple-choice style of vocabulary test; but it is rather complex, specialized in purpose, and difficult to administer. An entirely new test is one which I have called the "sentence-environment vocabulary test." It has been developed out of the suggestions of modern linguistic science; it makes good common sense, has proved useful and practical in my own teach-

ing, and seems to have great possibilities of refinement and special application. It is, in its everyday classroom form, very simple; but its simplicity rises out of a considered method of dealing with the complexities of the problem, not out of neglect of them.

I began work on this problem several years ago, when I found myself assigned to concentrated list-vocabulary instructions with first-year college students. I am a bit skeptical about whether list-vocabulary study is the best way to build vocabulary; but I am sure that—like any earnest and systematic study—it has considerable value. As soon as I began this sort of teaching, however, I found myself dissatisfied with all the traditional modes of testing students' success at assimilating the vocabulary items presented to them.

I never liked the business of telling students to use a set of words in sentences. The clever ones' ability to design sentences with a minimum of var-

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iety or explicitness pretty well shatters the validity of such answers; but worse, I think, is the less clever ones' talent for concocting sentences which would be right (apparently applying one of the memorized definitions) if they were not so absolutely and hopelessly wrong! I have always felt that attempts to construct discourse in any language with material not fully mastered are harmful to students—that until a wide control is built up, it is better to have much repetition of idiomatic material rather than original construction. When we make up anything ourselves, we are inclined to believe in it—including our own linguistic inventions, no matter how they deviate from acceptable patterns.

As for the other forms of vocabulary-testing—matching; multiple-choice of synonyms or antonyms; completion by multiple-choice; recall-completion from hints, first-letters and the like; definitions handled in various ways; and word-pair relationships—most of these deal with words in isolation. I found that they jarred upon me increasingly, as I considered them in relation to what recent linguistic methods are showing us about language and language analysis.

Sentence-completion questions perhaps have a contextual presentation; but they share many of the faults of the "use it in a sentence" sort of thing. For example, in a verbal aptitude test constructed by one of our chief testing agencies, the person answering was given a choice to fill the blank in *The candidate's speech was filled with empty promises, —————, and clichés.* among 1. *candor*, 2. *platitudes*, 3. *anger*, 4. *ingenuity*, and 5. *threats*. Though *platitudes* makes a nice triad, *threats*, *ingenuity*, and even *anger* might quite reasonably be chosen.

Other styles of completion tests, such as those suggesting first letters for the word required to fill the blank, and so

on, present even more difficulties and ambiguities, to the test-maker, the test-taker, and the test-rater.

All this is not to say that these various forms of vocabulary-test do not have their uses and good qualities. My own view of them was that they probably did not exhaust the possibilities, and might quite possibly be improved upon.

I had in mind the work of the linguists of our time—their rigorous method of dealing with the problem of meaning in their analytic processes, by taking it in its simplest, most obvious *differential* aspect, rather than its *referential* one; asking, "Does this mean the same as that?" rather than, "What does this mean?" I also considered the applicability of the linguists' even more rigorous distributional analyses, by which they examine the environment of a morpheme, and its total distribution in a corpus, rather than its "meaning," and philosophical theories about it.

I considered also that there is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between so-called "synonyms"; and that tests based on matching words with supposed synonyms may give a very bad idea of how a word can actually be used. For instance, the best synonym for *cadaverous*, in a suggested choice among *robust*, *ghastly*, *loathsome*, *sepulchral*, and *impalpable*, would doubtless be *ghastly*. Yet a student, even after learning the approved answer, might easily be confirmed in the belief that he could as well say, "That's a cadaverous mistake," as, "That's a ghastly mistake."

The difference, of course, lies in the total distribution of the two supposed synonyms.

Why not, then, use distributional criteria in vocabulary testing itself? Why not present students with a simple, clear, and readily-handled proposition: the word whose meaning is being studied,

placed in a sentence where it is either acceptable or unacceptable, i.e.,

1. The door opened, and a tall, **cadaverous** woodsman stepped into the store.
2. I tell you, you are making, a **cadaverous** mistake.
3. It was a horrifying, **cadaverous** story.

Now anyone who knows the word *cadaverous*, as it is actually used in modern English, can make a definite answer about those three sentences: 1. is acceptable; 2. and 3. are unacceptable. If someone answers badly, and then is told the right answers, he has learned something sound and solid, about the meaning of *cadaverous*; he is not left with a vague impression that 2. might be all right, since *ghastly* is a synonym for *cadaverous*, or that 3. might be all right, since *cadaverous* etymologically derives from a Latin word for *corpse*, and the story might be full of corpses. Yet such vague confusions are readily picked up from synonyms and definitions.

The meaning of a word is defined by its distribution, scientifically speaking—definitions and synonyms help us to learn it, but we never really know it until we know the environments in which it is used, and those in which it is not used.

The procedure of sentence-environment vocabulary testing, then, is simply this:

Sentences are set up, with the word to be tested placed in a context in which it is either definitely acceptable or definitely unacceptable. The respondent must simply ask himself, "Does the sentence make satisfactory normal sense, not self-contradictory, and not violently strained for humor or otherwise, with the word which is underlined (or italicized or otherwise specified) placed as it is? His answer is a simple *yes* or *no*, or an equivalent mark or indication. To eliminate the factor of guesswork I have found two sentences for each word a necessary and sufficient number. Both must be right for credit; one or both

wrong would cause loss of credit for the word in question. A few examples will suffice.

- 1 a. I am not sure how your story will effect him.
b. Do you think you can effect a reform in him?
(1 a. *being unacceptable*; 1 b. *acceptable*)
- 2 a. Those colors are so inharmonious as to be thoroughly compatible.
b. That theory is compatible with the known facts, and therefore it is not scientifically acceptable.
(Neither 2 a. nor 2 b. *acceptable*)
- 3 a. That quarrel caused the complete disruption of the conference.
b. Disruption of all transportation systems resulted as the bombing continued.
(Both 3 a. and 3 b. *acceptable*)

Experience implies that this sort of test is reliable and valid; I am sure that it would stand up well under research in either qualification. Of course, like all tests, it must be prepared wisely and carefully, with full consideration of the circumstances.

Such questions and answers do not require the student to attempt premature use of only partly-learned words. They give no encouragement to drawing unjustified conclusions about other uses of any word tested, and as little encouragement as possible to mistaken ideas about the uses exemplified. They make excellent practice material. And in this connection, I am definitely convinced that the old pedagogical rule that forbids presenting students with incorrect language forms in teaching is inapplicable here. On the contrary, I am sure that the repetition of many correct sentences using a given word is comparatively ineffective in fixing a clear idea of the word's possibilities. Attention drifts.

It is of course very probable that contact with the word in an effective continuous context of literature or vigorous speech is an extremely strong force in fixing attention and interest upon a new vocabulary item. That is the great advan-

tage of vocabulary learned entirely in context, as I hinted at the beginning of this article.

But once a word becomes an item of studied vocabulary, I am certain that learning it proceeds faster by the attention-arresting process of discrimination of wrong and acceptable uses, than by mere repetition of right ones.

In testing, the possibility of applying the simplest sort of response requirements for sentence-environment test answers, and setting up mechanical scoring adaptations, are obvious.

One other value should also be obvious; and in this respect I can see no comparable adaptability in any of the previously standard vocabulary tests, even with the excellent but somewhat cumbersome Osenburg adaptation of multiple-choice synonyms. The other value I mean is the capacity of this test form for almost unlimited refinement as

a testing or learning device. The use of three, five, or even ten sentences for each word would be quite a simple matter; and every additional sentence would add something to the coverage and completeness of the test. The additional sentences could include a deliberate and carefully organized use of the entire gamut of meanings for the word tested, or a large part of them, and a careful presentation of the probable misapprehensions. Flexibility would be possible also, in the number of right answers required out of each set, according to the purposes and circumstances of the particular testing situation. The testing could be refined, too, by the use of some form of connected discourse, instead of entirely separate sentences.

Altogether, I feel certain that the sentence-environment vocabulary test form will prove an extremely valuable instrument for testing and teaching the lexical element of any language.

Trends in the Secondary School Teaching of English¹

RICHARD CORBIN²

My assignment, the topic "Trends in the Secondary School Teaching of English," brought several questions immediately to mind. A baffling one turned out to be the question how one determines a trend in so confused an area as high school English, especially if the reporter is part of the scene, as I am, and therefore permitted by time and distances only a limited vantage-point. When I know so little about what takes place in my colleagues' classrooms down the corridor, how can I pretend a knowledge of the practices in the thousands of

English classrooms scattered across the nation? Of course, there *are* the professional publications and conferences to help me overcome my provincialism, but some doubts trouble me about this easy answer.

For instance, how accurately do the professional publications report what is happening in the classrooms or, more important, in the minds of the generality of English teachers? More specifically, how close to National Council thinking, as reflected in its various publications, is the classroom practice of tens of thousands of high school teachers of English across the land? I should like to think that the majority of us working teachers are coursing at the heels of our lead-

¹Revision of a paper presented in Panel IX, CCCC Spring meeting, Hotel Statler, New York, March 23, 1956.

²Peekskill Public Schools

ers, breathing hotly down their necks, but objective consideration forces me to wonder if a wider gap does not exist between the leaders and the led than the Council, if pressed, would care to admit.

Aggravating this doubt, too, is the suspicion that thousands of English teachers have never heard of the National Council or its publications, and that many thousands more read the Council's materials with only a cynical or passing interest. So here is the crux of my problem: are the trends for which I am looking to be found in the proceedings of the Council? Or are they lurking, unidentified and unpublicized, in 50,000 undiscovered classrooms about the nation?

My second troubling doubt concerns the professional conference. How reliable a weathervane are the talks and discussions at these meetings? There is no question that the winds blow lustily at these gatherings, but how does the observer distinguish prevailing currents from momentary, though sometimes startling, twisters whipped up in panic the last few days before the talk is given? I myself taught for seven years before I became aware that such an organization as the National Council existed; I taught for 16 years before I attended my first convention. I have often wondered how my present methods and philosophy of teaching English might have been affected if I had known of and been active in Council work from the first, if I had heard all the conference talks in the '30s and '40s during my formative years as a teacher. Since 1949 I have enthusiastically attended a total of nine national and eight state conventions, and no fewer than forty county and sectional meetings. But while I have enjoyed and profited from them all, as my experience with them has accumulated, I have become more and more aware that too large a proportion of the participants at meeting after meeting

are "the old familiar faces" humming "the old familiar tunes." From my own small section of the country, for example, of roughly a hundred teachers of English who *should*, I am confident I can calculate on my fingers the teachers who *have* attended a state or national meeting—and I would not need an abnormal set of toes to account also for those who have participated in local meetings. Furthermore, I have been too frequently astonished at inspired, authoritative-sounding talks delivered by teachers whose classroom practices, I had good reason to suspect, bore little resemblance to their bright word-paintings. I will forego mentioning the number of "how-to-do-it" talks I have heard given by college teachers who obviously had spent little if any time in the earthier climate of the high school English classroom. So I am tempted to question the relationship that exists between the talks we hear in these meetings and the facts of classroom life.

I do not doubt that trends are spawned sometimes at these conferences and in our journals; it is merely that these discomforting thoughts lead me at times to question privately the extent to which the writings and pronouncements of our national, state, and special interest groups—such as CCCC—accurately reflect what is happening to English teaching, or sometimes the other way around, the extent to which observable trends have been propagated by these groups.

Perhaps by now you have detected my dilemma. I have been asked to tell you about the "trends" in the teaching of high school English, and I do not have complete faith in the reliability either of my principal sources or of my own observations, for I am literally tied to a single classroom in a flooding sea of classrooms. Having warned you of my uncertainties, I shall try nevertheless to point out a few trends that seem to me major and most soundly established in

the practices of the high school teachers of English of whom I know. I will limit my comments to the teaching of composition, because there is not space enough here to cover the boundless area that comprises the "language arts" and because, anyway, I assume that composition is the main concern of this conference.

First of all, there is, it seems to me, a re-awakened and growing awareness on the part of most high school teachers of the importance of good writing, not only as an essential skill, but also as a means of inducing more exact thinking in our students. This new interest in an old but long neglected problem stems from several sources: from the strong dose of public criticism we have been receiving, from the expanding interest in and use of the CEB examinations, from the student-related comments of disgruntled Freshman English instructors, and, to some extent, from the sympathetic interest and helpful materials that are beginning to flow to us from the communications experts of industry. This constructive interest that business and industry are taking in problems of the high school, incidentally, is one that the colleges might emulate with some profit to us all.

Unfortunately, this general concern over the writing ability of our students is producing in us also an unnerving frustration. For just when we high school teachers are awakening to the need, are being supplied with greatly improved methods and materials, and are at the point of implementing the gospel that "a student learns to write by writing, and learns to write well by rewriting," we find ourselves faced in most communities by two counter-trends beyond our control—first, by an alarming tendency on the part of local boards of education to solve their space and personnel problems by increasing class sizes and teacher loads; and, second, by a measurable

deterioration in the average quality of students now entering the secondary schools, both public and private. Just how can a teacher with five teaching periods and a teaching load of 150 more or less reluctant pupils daily, a study hall to supervise, a homeroom register, and an extra-curricular assignment carry on an effective writing program? And this is an actual and typical, not an abnormal, case. I presume that anyone familiar with the problem of teaching can gauge the implications for himself—one writing assignment a week nets 150 papers to read and comment on. And at high school level, anyway, the written comments are not of much value without a follow-up conference . . . 150 conferences a week and necessarily within a 45-minute period.

Or should students be asked to write papers that are not read, merely for the practice of putting words on paper?

In the face of this next to impossible situation, I was not surprised recently to hear a booksalesman express (and he is not a person given to loose exaggeration) the belief that the majority of the English teachers he visits require no composition work at all. I fear he is too nearly right, though I am not inclined to question the sincerity of the high school teachers in their expressed concern about student writing or their willingness to teach writing where conditions make it humanly possible.

A second trend, further developed, it seems to me, than the first, is the tendency to recognize the separate nature of usage in teaching grammar and to revert to teaching grammar as an important part of English—to treating it as a subject to be studied in orderly fashion by the whole class, rather than as superficial matter to be introduced piecemeal "whenever the need arises for explaining a term." The authors of one of the new high school composition series, for

instance, state in their preface: "Let us hope that the movement toward relegating grammar to the back of the book as a matter of secondary practice is on the wane . . . Taught by steps and in a constructive, inductive manner, grammar becomes a living process; it need have little resemblance to the dreary subject that many students have detested."³ This was expressed as a "hope" by the authors, but I am more sanguine. During the past two decades, the discoveries of the linguists have finally been finding their way into the consciousness of the working teachers. With our new understandings of the nature and function of language, a realistic study of "English" grammar seems to be meeting with increasing enthusiasm from teachers and pupils alike. Unfortunately most recent high school textbooks in English contain little help for the enlightened teacher, offering for the most part a watered, cartoon-bedecked version of prescriptive grammar rather than the rational approach to "living" grammar promised so blithely in the prefaces.

The third and final trend is not so easy to describe. It originates, I believe, in concern for the thought-process itself—with the inability of pupils in general and our abler pupils in particular to marry ideas with exact, clear language. In a world of shrinking space and increasingly complex human problems, we are coming to appreciate more and more the close relationship between qualitative thinking and survival. In spite of the dangerous overload of responsibilities in the English curriculum, a substantial number of teachers are accepting voluntarily the added responsibility of trying to improve the thought-process in their students. Here, a chief obstacle is the teachers' own lack of training and knowledge, for of the trends noted this

one certainly lies closest to the frontier.

No doubt there are other trends that might be brought to attention, if there were space. A few, like the increased interest in teaching the uses of the dictionary, the preparation of the long, research paper, seem subordinate to more significant trends in the teaching of high school composition at present. Trends in the teaching of literature, reading, and speech—though certainly related to the writing process—have of course been omitted.

If the tone of these comments seems somewhat dejected, I have not meant it to be so. I am really quite proud of the quality of the figs so many of my colleagues manage to wrest so consistently from their thistle patches. Perhaps not everyone is aware that from every June's harvest, we peasant-teachers faithfully forward ten to forty percent of the best of each crop as a tithe to our "lords and masters" in the colleges—though I must admit that from some of the educational wastelands, the amount of the tithe may be substantially less and the quality of the offering not entirely worthy of their tables. Some of the professional cynics I am sure will not believe this, but we do separate and hold back almost all of the tares in our own communities (a calculated risk, for not infrequently they take firm root in our local boards of education) and send to the colleges only our "top-graded best."

Much of the time we take pride in these products as we prepare them for delivery, a pride that helps to warm and sustain us—at least until the reports come filtering down from the colleges that our graduates are uncritical readers, incompetent writers, grammatical ignoramus-es, and thinkers of non-thoughts. Of course, what is happening to us is nothing new. There have always been and will no doubt always be complaints from the people "up there." It is an ancient

³From the Preface, *English At Work Series*. Rev. Ed., Bryant, Howe, Jenkins and Munn. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.

and honorable social practice that will probably not soon be discarded. We English teachers in the lower schools only wish there were some kind of flood-

control gates up in "them thar ivy-infested hills" that would make possible a more effective use of this flow of sometimes helpful criticism.

Measuring the Quality of the Teaching of English

HERMAN A. ESTRIN¹

What kinds of evaluation are used in your college? What use is made of the results of this evaluation? Is evaluation of teaching the chief means of determining professional advancement? Which approach of student evaluation do you favor? If you had to be evaluated, what means would you prefer to use?

These questions stemmed from the discussions in the workshop "Measuring the Quality of Teaching," sponsored by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1957.² The fifty members of the workshop agreed to complete a questionnaire relating to the evaluation of teaching English.

To the question: Does your college have some kind of systematic evaluation of teaching? Fifty-seven percent answered no; forty-three percent, yes. Of the kinds of evaluation that were used, the most popular type was the student evaluations—statistical analysis, essay, and instructor's form, in that order.

Some descriptions of the student evaluations are as follows:

The Student Association prepares its own rating form. These are seen by the teacher only, although he may turn them over to the Dean.

Examination service provides forms to instructors upon their request. In terms of ten qualities, students are asked to compare the teacher with four or five other teachers whom they have had.

Students from Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, contact the instructors and ask them whether they want to be rated by their classes. If so, they are rated on the following categories: organization of subject matter, speaking ability, ability to explain, encouragement to thinking, attitude toward students, knowledge of subject, attitude toward subject, fairness in examinations, tolerance to disagreements, instructor as "human being," greatest weakness of instructor, strongest asset of instructor. The members of the fraternity describe the rating system to the class; distribute, collect, and tally the rating forms; and return them to the instructor. Only the instructor receives the results of the evaluation.

Classroom visits were used by forty-three percent of the colleges. Descriptions of this procedure follow:

Each instructor agrees to visit each other's freshman classes periodically to discuss their impressions with the instructor visited, and to discuss—provided that the instructor visited agrees—their impressions at weekly staff meetings.

A new member of the department is assigned to an older permanent member who visits his classes and discusses with him any problems connected with his teaching.

New instructors are assigned an experienced staff member who visits his classes at least once during the term; consults with him on matters of departmental policy, university practices and customs, and administrative details; inspects his grading practices; and generally acts as consultant for the year.

¹Newark College of Engineering

²For the report see *College Composition and Communication*, October, 1957, pp. 155-157.

Classrooms are visited by senior members of the faculty, the head of the department, and occasionally by the Dean of the College. In addition, the academic vice-president usually visits several classes a year. In the final analysis, the rating and evaluation, with recommendations, rests with the Head of the department.

The University statutes call for visitation by the department chairman. His visitation, however, is largely confined to graduate assistants and to new instructors. The Freshman English chairman also does a good deal of visitation of the same classes of people.

Several colleges stated that the administration performs the evaluation.

The Dean of each college makes informal reports to the Provost of the University. The faculty member receives no formal report of the evaluation of his work.

A few colleges used seniors to evaluate the instruction.

An evaluation is made by the seniors after their college work is completed. The Dean of the college is in charge; the forms are unsigned and have been filled out on a voluntary basis.

The results of visitation are primarily used in determining promotions, salary increases, discharges, tenure, and improvement of teaching technique. Also they may confirm judgments made on employment, indicate the value of further training, determine the teaching assignments, and unify the course of instruction. As for student evaluations, the results are given to the instructor who makes use of them as he wishes.

Fifty percent of the respondents stated that the evaluation of teaching is the chief means of determining professional advancement. The other fifty percent listed the means of promotion in this order: publications and research, the acquisition of a Ph.D. or other advanced degrees, professional activities and growth, service on committees, service to the college, seniority, service to the community, and superior teaching.

Only one-third of the colleges have compulsory evaluation of teaching. Five-sixths of them were in favor of voluntary student evaluation in principle as a means of improving teaching. Over seventy percent favored the essay form of student evaluation. Fourteen percent favored the statistical approach; another fourteen percent favored neither form of student evaluation.

Concerning student evaluations, the instructor is the sole person who uses them in over seventy percent of the colleges. Twenty-five percent of them turn the student evaluations to the chairman; the administration uses these evaluations in two percent of the colleges.

"If you had to be evaluated, what means would you prefer to use?" To this question the majority chose student evaluations, especially the essay form, and visitations by other members of the faculty, the head of the department, and the Dean. Other means were the analysis by a sympathetic master-teacher or supervisory officer, a system of senior-junior faculty member apprenticeships, opinions of colleagues, testing of students by outside agencies, and the use of as many different measures as possible.

It is interesting to note the negative comments concerning evaluations.

I am against the whole business at least insofar as present methods go. None of them, it seems to me, are valid, fair, and useful methods of determining who is a good teacher. Student evaluation is by far the worst, the most vicious method.

In an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, no visitations and no evaluations avail, and they had better not be tried.

Many respondents made suggestions relevant to the problem of measuring the quality of teaching.

Although no one system of evaluation can adequately do the job, some system is necessary. Many considerations must be taken into account; limitations

of time, lack of sufficient faculty in numbers, the shortcomings of human evaluation, among others.

It should be done, in each department, by the Head with the help of an advisory board made up of tenured staff members . . . We have just installed such a board.

A successful evaluation system must be created by the teachers themselves and must be subject to change through democratic processes.

The student is in the best position to judge a teacher, but he is young and frequently is inclined to be arrogant. Students should be made to see that it is not a right to evaluate the teacher, but it is a request made because of demonstrated maturity. It follows that only certain classes should evaluate the teacher.

Each teacher is, of course, concerned with improving the quality of his teaching. The immediate evaluation by the student who has just completed a course is valuable as a measure of how clearly the objectives were presented and possibly how well the material was presented. At any rate, each student's evaluation may help the teacher understand how well he is meeting each student.

The evaluators must ever hold in mind that their evaluations are not time-study investigations or reports on the efficiency of machines. They are studying a human being, not an impersonal instrument; therefore, their evaluations ought to be adjusted to the obvious differences in personality. They must recognize that different people working with methods different from their own often achieve the same valuable results that they do.

There is a need of systematic evaluation of instruction . . . Although promotion and/or salary increments now depend more upon the possession of

the Ph.D. than upon the quality of instruction, the latter might receive greater emphasis if a system of evaluation were introduced.

These evaluations are useful as an aid to improving one's instruction if taken seriously by both the evaluator and the one being evaluated.

Findings:

1. Fifty percent of the respondents stated that their colleges had some kind of systematic evaluation of teaching.
2. Of the kinds of evaluations that were used, the most popular type was the student evaluations—statistical analysis, essay form, and instructor's form—in that order.
3. Classroom visits for evaluation of teaching were used by forty-three percent of the colleges.
4. Results of visitation are primarily used in determining promotions, salary increases, discharges, tenure, and improvement of teaching techniques.
5. Fifty percent of the respondents stated that the evaluation of teaching is the chief means of determining professional advancement.
6. The other means of promotion are publications and research, the acquisition of a Ph.D. or other advanced degrees, professional activities and growth, service on committees, service to the college, seniority, service to the community, and superior teaching.
7. One-third of the colleges which responded have compulsory evaluation of teaching.
8. Five-sixths of the respondents favored voluntary student evaluation in principle as a means of improving teaching.
9. Over seventy percent favored the essay form of student evaluation.
10. In over seventy percent of the colleges the instructor is the sole person who uses student evaluations.
11. The majority of instructors agreed that student evaluation, especially the essay form, was the means of evaluation which they would choose if they had to be evaluated.

Among the New Texts¹

CONSTRUCTIVE THEME WRITING,

Mary Ellen Chase and Henry W. Sams
(Holt, 3rd ed., 660 pp., \$4.95).

The third edition of *Constructive Theme Writing* presents a variety of essays within the three main parts of "Themes of Experience," "Themes of Fact and Information," and "Themes of Thought and Reflection." Each main part receives further division into about a half-dozen chapters, some of subject matter, some of technique, and some of genre—e.g., "Themes about Animals," "Themes of Comparison and Contrast," and "Biography." Each chapter begins with commentary and ends with a series of exercises. Questions that both extend the commentary and anticipate the final exercises follow each of the essays within the chapters.

Readers familiar with the admirable second edition of 1938 will recognize that the titles of the three main parts have remained the same. But aside from this, Professor Sams, of Chicago, has thoroughly freed himself from the earlier edition by Professor Chase, emeritus of Smith. Of the nineteen chapters (against the earlier fifteen) many of the titles are changed and with few exceptions the commentary is entirely Mr. Sams' own; of the ninety-six selections more than two-thirds are new ones and most of these are complete essays. Questions on the individual essays, which in the 1938 edition appeared only as a part of the general exercises, are new. Possibly the only place where Mr. Sams has suffered from the constriction of the older edition appears in the title and the frequent echoing of the word "theme" throughout the book. (Digressively I wonder why college teachers who have been so long so happy with "theme" and "composition" boggle at the "language arts" of their colleagues in secondary schools.) Except for this fondness, Mr. Sams has made a revision remarkable in thoroughness, perception, and independence, yet a revision that preserves the essence of Miss Chase's earlier work. As she comments in her foreword, "The book is quite new again, and I believe I may say that it still retains its identity."

G. A.

THE HARPER HANDBOOK OF COMMUNICATION, C. Merton Babcock (Harper and Brothers, 489 pp., \$3.50).

¹Reviews bearing initials are submitted by members of the Editorial Board.

Aiming directly at adoptions by Communication Skills programs, this book has the strength and characteristics of the approach. Recognizing that the "two-way process" of communication is "at once a personal, social, and linguistic affair," the text analyzes "the dynamics of communication" and the psychology of communicator and audience before it turns to language. With the exception of structural linguistics, the text utilizes all the new techniques—semantics, group dynamics, Birdwhistellian kinesics, listening evaluation charts, and mass media analyses—to help the student toward communication that is purposeful, directed to specific people, and heavily reliant upon facts and detailed information.

The book suffers, perhaps, from its scope. Professor Babcock has so much to say that he frequently has to limit his discussions to outlines of his material. He must treat so many sub-skills that he resorts occasionally to generalized edicts. For instance, in attempting to show how to become a good conversationalist, the text suggests that self-confidence, a sense of humor, and social grace be developed but skips on without instruction about these traits. Each chapter, however, contains an excellent bibliography which helps to overcome this syllabus-like bareness of content and style.

H. H. C.

THE UNIVERSITY SELF-TEACHING DICTIONARY GUIDE, Richard Braddock (Rinehart, 23 pp., .35, paper).

The line that must be drawn somewhere between anarchy and regimentation in multiple-sectioned Freshman English is increasingly difficult to draw respecting the required dictionary. Everyone agrees that each freshman should own a dictionary and that he should be required early in the course to learn how to use it. But instructors can no longer agree on which dictionary should be required. Despite the excellent dictionary guides supplied free by the several publishers, classroom drill becomes difficult with three or four acceptable dictionaries in the hands of students.

Richard Braddock's pamphlet *Dictionary Guide* solves the problem wherever Webster's *New Collegiate*, Webster's *New World Dictionary*, and the *American College Dictionary* are acceptable alternate texts. Presumably subsequent editions can not only

conform to later editions of these dictionaries, but can accommodate other dictionaries that seem to merit inclusion.

This *Guide* provides exercises (called operations) in the familiar areas of dictionary use. The entire dictionary study is designed to require less than a week and to end with a test to be done outside of class. Thus the *Guide* is short. It is also amazingly inexpensive. Doubtless any lengthening would raise the price, yet one is tempted to call for 1) direction of attention to supplementary material like the rules of spelling, history of the language, rules of punctuation, 2) a comment in Operation 3 (on the hyphen) on the positional hyphen of compound adjectives and in Operation 2 on the dictionary style for hyphen and syllable division, 3) warning on the proper use of italics with foreign words, 4) supplementary alternate forms of the University Dictionary Test for which the instructor or institution might be induced to pay.

THE COLLEGE RESEARCH PAPER, 4th ed., Eugene F. Grewe and John F. Sullivan (Wm. C. Brown Company, 146 pp., \$2.25, ring-bound paper).

The basic virtues of this manual have been known to users since its first appearance in 1948. The innovations in this fourth edition include, for the teacher, 1) a 31-item bibliography on teaching the research paper (six of the articles originally appeared in *CCC*), and for the student, 2) an unequivocal definition of plagiarism, 3) a distinction between fact and opinion, 4) an array of words and phrases for introducing quoted material, 5) a spelling out of the kinds and degrees of borrowing, 6) a set of criteria for evaluating sources, 7) an example of the usual sophomore literary paper based upon sources. Significant of the increasingly pervasive effect of the *MLA Style Sheet* is the fact that these authors have revised recommended footnote and bibliography forms more closely to conform to the *MLA* prescriptions. The sample freshman research paper is also new.

F. J. W.—F. E. B.

A THEME CORRECTION GUIDE, Robert DeMaria, (Holt, 89 pp., \$1.25, paper).

For a freshman group using a book of reading for its main text, this eye-catching guide in red, white, and black will be a practical substitute for a larger more expensive handbook. It contains rules and cor-

rective examples for errors in logic, effectiveness, diction, spelling, punctuation, grammar, form, and research. The inside covers and the index are excellent helps in finding rules involved in themes. The errors are marked with large red letters for the general mistake, and small ones for the particular type. For instance "P. c." indicates "punctuation" and "comma error." One will wonder that the two examples of footnotes on page 85 are without pagination. The make-up of this guide and its ease in use will please students.

F. J. W.

WALDEN, Henry David Thoreau, ed. Sherman Paul (Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Editions, 238 pp., .65, paper).

Professor Paul has aimed to make this edition much more than just another reprinting of *Walden*. In all, he supplies forty pages of his own commentary and reproduces an essay by a British reformer who may have stimulated Thoreau to act and write out his disagreement. A very close and subtle student of New England transcendentalism, the editor ably uses Emerson to explain Thoreau and his larger background; he also analyzes painstakingly the genesis, inner order, and root metaphors of *Walden*. Throughout he is perceptive and cogent. However, his main introduction will not win over the undergraduates who never heard of Thoreau or else suspect him on first sight. This edition is essentially for the student who already knows the basic turns of the argument and is capable of absorbing a barrage of advanced insights.

LOUIS J. BUDD
Duke University

SELECTIONS FROM RALPH WALDO EMERSON, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Editions, 517 pp., \$1.15, paper).

This generous volume of selections from the writings of our perhaps least read writer will do much to restore to the modern reader, particularly the reader in college, some of the extraordinary intellectual vigor and large humanity of Emerson. The editor's aim has been to make easily accessible the figure of Emerson as "an artist who makes us see the creative energy of thinking, the original leap and grasp of the mind in action." A dozen major essays and addresses are included and more than

thirty poems, but the bulk of the volume very rightly consists of selections from the journals. The general arrangement is primarily chronological by major phases in Emerson's intellectual career (except for the poems, which are grouped at the end), so that each major piece is placed squarely in the rich context of the journals. Placed thus in its proper milieu—the mind of Emerson—it gathers fresh meaning unto itself and imparts its own to the whole body of Emerson's writing, as his best readers have always known.

CARL L. ANDERSON
Duke University

THE SOUND OF WINGS, eds. Joseph B. Roberts and Paul L. Briand, (Holt, 303 pp., \$5.00).

This specialized anthology of prose and poetry tracing the development of air flight, from Ovid's fanciful "The Fall of Icarus" to Jonathan N. Leonard's "Rocket Shooting at White Sands" is edited by two members of the English Department of the U. S. Air Force Academy.

Some of the selections will be familiar because they are from Poe's "The Balloon Hoax," poems of Tennyson, Freneau, Spender; and the works of Anne Morrow Lindbergh and Michener. Even though Trowbridge's poem and Thurber's story are laughable, they also trace the history of wings to jets.

For students in aeronautical colleges, and for air-minded readers this book will be pleasant reading. It would only be curious outside reading for the ordinary university student. Had the editors omitted Hoskins' poem and the stories of Shaw and Gellhorn, their selections would be commendable: they have an attractive looking book.

F. J. W.

THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM, William D. Howells, ed. Edwin H. Cady (Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Editions, xxx and 299 pp., .85, paper).

The text is that of the standard edition of 1885. Dr. Cady, author of *The Road to Realism, The Early Years (1873-1885) of William Dean Howells*, provides an introduction on the significance of *Lapham* in the development of the American novel and a bibliographical note.

GREAT ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ESSAYS, ed. Douglas S. Mead (Rinehart Editions, revised and enlarged, 244 pp., .65, paper).

The "number of essays . . . increased from thirty to thirty-five" with "a somewhat larger representation of the modern era."

Differential Methodologies for Freshmen¹

MacCurdy Burnett²

Samuel Butler might have been addressing part of the pedagogue's conscience when he announced that "Truth is only that which is most largely and permanently timesaving."

The point I will try to make here in this discussion is that some methods borrowed from the linguists save lots of time in lots of courses. As used in at least one small college, the pointing-out

of a selected and a sufficient number of prominent and frequent linguistic features constitutes a powerful teaching tool for teaching conventional subject-matter.

1. Teaching Restricted Phonemic Transcription

This note summarizes a technique for teaching Restricted Phonemic Transcription: Prepare dittoed or mimeographed sheets which include a three-hundred-word transcript in the Trager-Smith notation of material available in print to all students—perhaps an excerpt from a text. Include unit phonemes, primary

¹Part of a paper presented in Panel I, CCCC Spring meeting, Hotel Morrison, Chicago, March 21, 1957. Mr. Burnett has replaced his original first section using IPA symbols with the present extended note omitting them.

²Maryland State Teachers College

stresses; show transitions by spacing; show junctures by arrows pointing level, down, or up. Triple-space this material, generously hand-lettered. Distribute it without lecturing in advance.

Most students will be able to read it on sight. When two or three have read it aloud, have the class read it aloud, in chorus. Ask that they copy this material at least twice *while reading it aloud*, out of class.

This will take about twelve minutes. (The remainder of the period can be devoted to transcribing students' names on the blackboard.)

At the next class meeting, dictate, preferably from tape, a passage to be transcribed. Five repetitions are sufficient for an eighteen-word sentence. Unit phonemes are transcribed first, then primary stresses, then junctures.

Distribute a dittoed transcript of what has been dictated, and have students correct their transcriptions, examining first the nuclear vowels, as in "bit, bet, bat, but, bot," and the commonest rounded back vowels, as in "boot, beat, bought." Then check the commonest off-glides, as in "beet, bait, bite." Finally, those vowels followed by length or friction are checked for a following *h*.

Last among the unit symbols to be checked are those not in the Roman alphabet: The schwa, barred *i*, digraph and open *o*; the thorn and theta; those which represent the first consonant-sounds in "chip, gyp, assure, azure," and the last sound in "bing."

Finally, check the plus junctures, primary stresses and transitions.

Students will by this time be operationally well acquainted with some aspects of the phonemics of English, which will serve as an introduction to the subject; systematic lecture can begin here.

2. *Restricted Morphemic Classification for Parts of Speech Analysis*

Most of us here, however, are concerned more with the teaching of composition. Here, too, the application of a linguistic approach pays large dividends; it is possible, for example, to treat the common elements of the morphemics of written and printed materials in two class periods, with the result that freshmen gain a quite adequate functional command of the most frequent morphological-syntactic patterns—to the extent that they learn the "parts of speech" finally, completely, and lastingly. Proof of this lies in the fact that nearly all freshmen can classify at least twenty-four out of every twenty-five words they see in print—can and do classify them *in the same way*.

There are three stages in this analysis: inflectional, derivational, and positional. Every word encountered in writing is tested for potential and actual inflection, derivation, and position in the sentence in which it occurs. If it has alternate spellings, it is classified as a form word; if it has none, as a function-word. Form words are classified as nouns or verbs on the basis of inflection—the "s" serves, alone, to classify most of them: If the "s" makes a difference between one and more than one, we have a noun. If it does not, we probably have a verb—but not certainly. At the next stage, inflection is ignored and derivation considered. At the derivational level, the terms "nounform," "verbform," "adjectiveform," and "adverbform" are applied:

Nounform	:	information	white
Verbform	:	inform	whiten
Adjectiveform	:	informal	white, -r, -st
Adverbform	:	informally	whitely

On the positional level, the terms "nominal," "verbal," "adjectival," and "adverbial" are applied to positions in which these forms function. (Stress can be invoked here, too, for simplicity's sake—but it is not necessary.)

For example: In the written sentences,

- 1 We had dinner at the white house.
- 2 We had dinner at the White house.
- 3 We had dinner at the White house.

—"white" and "White" are inflectionally,

- 1 Adjective adverb; no potential inflection.
- 2 Noun; inflection for possessive "s" is permissible.
- 3 Capitalized adjective or adverb; no potential inflection.

On the derivational level, they are

- 1 Adjectiveform; derivational suffixes permitted
- 2 Nounform; suffixization not permissible
- 3 Nounform; suffixization not permissible

Positionally, they are

- 1 Adjectival; "the house which is white."
- 2 Nominal; "of White."
- 3 Hypothetically adjectival because not positionally substitutable for nominals, verbals, or adverbials. However, it occupies a unique position, unlike "white"; but it differs graphically from "white" by virtue of a capital letter. Structurally, it enters into a nominal word-group like "Greyhound (bus)" and "Brownstone."

(Linguistically, the major contrast between 1 and 2 is stress, and between 2 and 3, juncture. "White House" is a linguistic compound but not a graphic one.) In fuller graphic analysis, "White House" as a unit is seen as such,

positionally, by virtue of substitution: it is positionally equivalent to "place."

Two assumptions lie in the above analysis:

1. At every stage of analysis, a word with several spellings can be classified as belonging in at least one form-class.
2. Negative evidence is admissible—e.g., if a word does not fit into three classes, it belongs in the fourth. For example: In "That pig is worth a lot," "worth" is not inflectable; derivationally, since it contrasts with "worthy" and "worthily," it is neither an adjectiveform nor an adverbform. Our evidence is contradictory, if we compare findings on different levels. Reconsidering of the inflectional level, we recall that some nouns are non-inflectable, but no verbs are, so we tentatively assign "worth" to the noun class inflectionally. Derivationally, we are uncertain still; positionally, if we admit the hypothetical "That pig is of great worth" as employing "worth" in the "same" way as in the original sentence, we can call "worth" a nominal. Inconsistent findings on different levels are not always signs of trouble, though; "inconsistent" is uninflectable; derivationally, even after peeling off the prefix, it is a suffixed adjectiveform built up from a verb, operating in this sentence as an adjectival. "Findings" is an inflected noun built on an inflected verb, positionally nominal. Nothing kind can be said about it, derivationally.

Some sets of forms are ambiguous in isolation, extracted from written texts: "orange juice," "human development." Is the juice made of oranges, or merely yellow-red? Does the writer refer to the development of humans, or development distinct-

tively human? We cannot tell. (The linguist could tell us, by hearing the stresses we used.) Only on the positional level—deciding whether the development is human or of humans—can we decide.

I apologize for the technicalities above. Nearly all analysis is much simpler than these illustrations—but a viable pedagogical system must be efficient, simple, and sufficiently thoroughgoing to treat nubbly little problems like those illustrated. This system, illustrated by a chart showing the common inflections (with the commonest exceptions) and affixes, can and has been taught in two hours—and turns out students who not only know the parts of speech—they prove this when they analyze material from sources outside textbooks—but turns out students who know *how* they know, which is even more important.

Function words are analyzed on the positional level. They are those which are members of classes, and those which are single items. Articles occur before nominals, auxiliaries before verbals, and degree-words before adjectivals and adverbials. Connectives occur between functional classes and sentences: prepositions, subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. The other frequently-occurring function words in writing are items: "to" before an uninflected verb, "There," usually sentence initial, "not," "than,"—and, very occasionally, "yes, no," and "please." The forms of sentence-initial "Do, Does, Did" and "Let's," as well as forms that can be followed by a terminal mark like "Well, . . . Now, . . . Why, . . ." plus verbs "Say, . . . Look, . . . Listen, . . ." occur chiefly in dialogue and belong formally—but not positionally—to already-established lists.

Subgroups of function words—those which occur in more than one list, and those which have different distributions in the same list—can be made by and/or for advanced students. For quick treat-

ment in a composition course, a list of the eighty oft-recurring ones suffices.

Swift treatment of word-function leaves class time and provides a foundation for syntactic and rhetorical analysis. Common sentence patterns are defined in terms of distributions of form and function words, and the sentences re-transcribed showing these patterns and points of primary stress and transition. For example:

1. The current program of suppression-
seriously endangers-
effective operation-
of our democracy.
2. It
lowers
the morale-
of the civil service-
and puts
a premium there-
on conformity-
and discourages
men of real ability-
from entering government ser-
vice.³

Dashes show level transitions, periods falling transitions, italics points of primary stress. Forms in subject, verb, and complement positions are shown by spacing.

Coherence, rhetorically, can be defined in terms of structural "sames" in adjacent sentences. Here, and in the four sentences that follow, it is high: Sentence verbs are inflectionally identical; each is followed by a direct object; each direct object is followed by a single prepositional phrase. Unity can be defined in terms of referential "sames;" here, the subjects are substitutable; some of the direct objects share elements of meaning: "operation, morale, premium." "Men" does not fit into this set—"men" is therefore emphatic, as are all elements which are not coherent or unified.

(Estimates of the contrasts between student and professional writing seem

³From Henry Steele Commager's "The Real Danger—Fear of Ideas," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 26, 1940, pp. 45, 47.

to indicate that the sums of contrasts in coherence and unity are greatest in the complement-headword position, next greatest in the complement postmodifier, and less in verb, subject, and adverbial - sentence - premodifier—in that order. This is a cumbersome way of saying that the complements of student-written sentences are much and measurably less unified and coherent than those of professionals. Yet, a rather rigidly-controlled study has shown that coherence and unity, together, is twenty-five times greater in the subject-verb positions of professionally-written material than in typical student themes!)

Thus does syntax offer a foothold on rhetoric.

3. *Subject - Subgroup Classification of Prose Passages for Rhetorical Classification*

Symbol	Example	Substitute	Name
IV	term	it and they	Fourth person
(III)	individualist	he or she	Third person sexless
III	Harry, Mary	he and she	Third person
I	I, we	I, we	First person
# ?	family	it or they	Numberless
II	you	you	Second person
IV-III	dog	it or he or she	Sexless

(There are other possible ones, of course—but these are empirically sufficient for gross classification. They are listed here in frequency-order. The theoretical justification for using these groups in "subject" classification is that, theoretically, selection of the subject subgroup of a sentence puts a limit on what can follow—this is a special case of the ergodic theorem, but let's not go into *that*.)

The order of classificatory listing is determined by frequency. We now have two echelons of organization; the first comprises the threefold division into "narration," "description," and "exposition." The second subgroups each of these divisions into seven subgroups. A third echelon, within the second, with binary numbers arranged from high to low, is possible: Each "1" records the

In classifying passages for descriptive rhetoric, narration, description, and exposition can be distinguished by comparing the sums of differential meanings of sentence-initial adverbial structures. If "time" adverbial structures predominate, the passage may be called "narration"; if "place" structures, "description"; if neither, "exposition." (Find a "request" sentence pattern, as in this sentence, and an element of "argument" is present! This paragraph, by virtue of the two initial adverbial structures, is "exposition"; by virtue of the preceding sentence, it has a touch of "argument.")

Within "narration," "description," and "exposition," sub-groupings are made on the basis of which substitute group of subject structures predominates. These are the substitute groups:

presence in the passage of a subject which fits into one of the latter six substitute groups listed above. If we omit the first sentence of this paper, for example, the Subclass Analytical Number of this paper would be "sIV 101000." The "s" means that it is "exposition," the "IV" that fourth-person subjects predominate over the sum of any other single substitute group, and the "101000" merely records the fact that all the structures in subject position in these sentences fit into subgroups "(III)," like "students," and "I," like "we." (Since subjects of "IV" occur in practically all passages, they are ignored at this echelon.)

The resulting classification will look like this:

I	Narration; accounts		
A	Of individual acts		
1	With dialogue	nIII	111110
2	With interior monologue	nIII	111010
B	Of social interaction	nIII	110000
C	Of observation form nature	nIII-IV	110001
II	Description		
A	Panoramic	rIV	010010
B	Restricted	rIV	000000
III	Exposition		
A	Characterization		
1	Occupational and Cultural	sIII	110000
2	Individual	sIII	010000
B	Discussions of Society and the Individual		
1	General	sIV	111100
2	In literature or politics	sIV	111000
3	In competition with peers	sIV	110000
4	In cultural consumption	sIV	101100
C	Specialized discussions		
1	Anthropology or language	sIV	101000
2	Logic	sIV	011000
3	Social philosophy	sIV	010000
4	Bibliography	sIV	001000
5	Metaphysics	sIV	000000
6	Literary criticism	sI	001000

The classifications-not-further-subdivided above may be unhappily named, but the *sequence* of materials determined by this scheme is pedagogically very useful indeed—it provides a systematic framework for the presentation of prose models. Passages classified as “same” serve both as objects of rhetorical study—they almost invariably share patterns of coherence and unity—but serve as models of subject, organization, and style for practical assignments. Such assignments are not only differentially precise—because they share elements of meaning—but they are related to each other because adjacent models share differential features. Thus, an element of linguistic method can even furnish an element of curricular coherence!

The features of differential meaning employed above are not properly struc-

tural; different observers may disagree as to whether some words belong in certain groups, as they are used in writing. But agreement is so substantial that the scheme is practical, pedagogically. Another objection might be that the scheme is cumbersome; in operation, though, it is not. It takes less time to classify a passage than it does to “skim” it—only adverbial subgroups and subject subgroups need be noted. This objection is really founded on a wholesome distaste for a procedure so odd that it seems to be absurdly arithmetical silliness. But it's useful.

4. *Systematic Methodology in “Mechanics”*

A young lady once submitted a four-hundred word typed theme which included these forms:

1	3	5	6
causal	American	wast	frillis
(casual)	(America)	(West)	ruffles
causal	duity	depondes	7
danity	(duty)	depondes	ridding
striaght	4	prefession	(riding)
Florida	grate	women	8
2	slaks	6	fine
cith	frillie	depondes	(find)
(city)	windie	depondes	9
			sectary

It was pointed out to her in conference that the words of list 1 shared the feature of transposed letters; list 2, substitution of letters; list 3, addition; list 4 words were regular, phonemically, but visually odd; list 5 included words wherein "a," "o," and "e" were substituted for two midvowel phonemes, e and schwa; list 6 included words wherein a written vowel was added before a final "s." List

7 had a phonemically irregular spelling—doubled consonants after an offglide; list 8 hinted at a tendency on the part of the speaker to follow in writing her tendency in speech to not release a puff of breath after a word-final dental consonant. List 9 suggested that, again in speech, an internal syllable got lost.

Her next theme—a six-hundred word one—included:

2	3	9
ne (me)	durning (during)	varitions
sivee (since)	5	(variations)
fing (find)	bargin (bargain)	

(The "i" of "bargin" is an idiolectical schwa, not /i/.)

More than three-quarters of the irregularities have disappeared. The longest lists no longer have members, with one exception. More important—no new patterns have appeared. New evidence suggests that items belong in list 2 by virtue of finger-slips to the left of the type-writer keyboard.

Setting up such systematic lists is of great practical usefulness—and illustrative of an important theoretical axiom: Language is systematic—that is, there is considerable limitation on what may occur in a language. Writing is also systematic. And, irregularities in language are systematic for any individual—as are irregularities in writing. The mere act of classifying irregularities, and encouraging students to look for them in their writing (while revising!) does a great deal toward helping students clear out of their writing those matters which attract attention to themselves; a linguistic orientation helps enormously in classifying more than half of the "bobbles" which occur in writing.

In short: There is no known area in the conventional course in composition which cannot be treated with something of a linguistic orientation, and developed, at least in preparation, with as much rigor as the teacher has time for. (The more rigorous the preparation, the less

the need for future revision—and the more time saved.) We should, I believe, teach skills in analysis so swiftly that our students become adept and gleefully amazed before their outrage over being cozened into the use of new techniques even arises! We should be as rigorous as possible in our use of the sufficiently smallest sums of prominent and frequent features of language. We will be better teachers for it.

Note: I have made quite free use of materials which are among the current classic reference works for the linguistically oriented teacher of English. May I acknowledge part of my debt and absolve their authors from any onus which may arise from my misinterpretation?

The phonemic notation used above is that of George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., *An Outline of English Structure* (Norman, Oklahoma: Battenburg Press, 1951). The morphological orientation is derived from Henry Lee Smith, Jr., "Superfixes and Syntactic Markers" (mimeographed material distributed at the Seventh Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Teaching at Georgetown University, April 13, 1956), and from Charles Carpenter Fries, *The Structure of English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952). The syntax owes more to the latter book than the former one. Implicit in the treatment of spelling is Edith Crowell Trager's "The Systematics of English Spelling," in *College Composition and Communication*, February, 1957.

The Standardized Test and Ability to Write: An Experiment

ARMAND F. BURKE AND SIGMUND A. SMITH¹

Most colleges administer some type of standard objective test to measure the incoming freshman's ability in composition, either before or after he has been admitted. In addition to this test, some colleges also weigh heavily the student's ability to write an acceptable essay, while others, for various reasons, place little emphasis on the student's performance as a writer before accepting him. Frequently, however, performance on objective tests of ability in mechanics of expression and effectiveness of expression is given serious consideration in developing the total profile of the incoming freshman. Recently at the State University Teachers College at Brockport, the English department was able to compare the performance of the entering freshman class on such tests with ability to perform in an actual writing situation. The results proved to be extremely interesting.

Seven years ago the English department at Brockport convinced the faculty that student writing ability was an all-college responsibility and, as a result, established an All-College English Committee whose present task is to determine the acceptability of the writing of any student whose papers have been judged inadequate by a faculty member. The student is first requested to write an essay which is read by three faculty members, one of whom must be an English instructor. None of the readers of a paper knows the student's name or how the other members of the committee have rated his writing. On the basis of this group's judgment, the student is

(1) given a clean bill of health as a writer, (2) required to enroll in a remedial writing section, or (3) requested to submit another essay for the committee's evaluation.

While most of the Brockport faculty agree that the All-College English Committee has functioned successfully, the increasing amount of work which the project entails has led to a search for other devices than the written essay as an indicator of student ability to write. One possibility seemed to be the scores on the Cooperative English Tests of Mechanics of Expression and Effectiveness of Expression. Since the results are available before the freshman enrolls in his first English course, they could possibly be used to determine whether a student ought to be sent immediately to a remedial writing section. However, some members of the English department have held serious reservations concerning the validity of the scores on these tests as an indication of writing ability.

In the fall of 1957, some of the questions raised by the skeptics in the Brockport English department were answered. At the end of the first quarter, the entire freshman class (317 students) was assigned impromptu written compositions which were read and evaluated by the All-College English Committee. Each student's performance on the composition was then measured against his scores on the standardized tests which had been administered as a part of the entrance examinations.

Of the 317 freshman essays read by the All-College English Committee, 148 were judged satisfactory, 68 unsatisfactory, and 101 satisfactory with reserva-

¹State Teachers College, Brockport, New York

tions.² On the Cooperative English Test, Form T, 66 students scored below the national mean for teachers colleges (48.1) on both the Mechanics of Expression and the Effectiveness of Expression tests, while 113 were below the mean on Mechanics of Expression alone, and 108 below the mean on Effectiveness of Expression.

Although these results appear to be in fairly close agreement, such is not the case. Actually, there were many exceptions. For example, only 25 students who passed the All-College English Committee's test of ability to write scored below the mean on the Mechanics of Expression test. On the other hand, 63 students who scored above the mean on this test either failed the written essay or were asked to submit another essay for evaluation. A similar picture developed with the Effectiveness of Expression test. Some 33 students who passed the written essay scored below the mean on this standardized test, while 76 students who either failed or passed conditionally the All-College English Committee's test of writing ability scored above the mean.

Only 14 students who scored below the mean for teachers colleges on both the Mechanics of Expression and Effectiveness of Expression tests were able to write a satisfactory essay for the All-College English Committee, but 48 students who scored below the national mean on both standardized tests were either failed or passed conditionally on the written essay.

As a matter of fact, further study indicated that the standardized tests of reading ability developed by the Educational Testing Service seem to predict

success or failure as a writer more accurately than those involving mechanics of expression or effectiveness of expression. A comparison of the reading scores of the 45 weakest readers in the freshman class with the results of the All-College English test of ability to write showed that only 9 of these students were able to write an acceptable essay. But only 12 of the 45 weak readers scored below the national mean for teachers colleges on both the Mechanics of Expression and the Effectiveness of Expression tests; 27 scored below the mean on one of these tests and 18 deficient readers scored above the mean on one test.

The validity of an experiment like the one described above is usually open to criticism, and certain questions probably come to mind immediately. For example, one might inquire whether the Cooperative English Tests attempt to predict ability to write satisfactorily. A careful study of what the publishers conceive the purpose of the tests to be would indicate that they do not.³ Any lingering doubts on this statement would be removed by a reading of Robert L. Wright's recent evaluation of Form Y of the tests.⁴ And granted that the skills tested are similar, one might question seriously the ability of three readers to judge student writing objectively.

This last question can probably be answered best by describing the procedure followed by the All-College English Committee in preparing new members for the job of judging student writing. Before new members of the committee are given student papers to read, the committee chairman explains carefully

²At the beginning of the second semester of the 1957-1958 college year, 71 students, or 21.9 percent of the freshman class, were enrolled in remedial English courses. This situation is less serious than conditions in a number of public universities. See Kenneth E. Eble, "The Burden of Bonehead," *The Journal of Higher Education*, January 1957, pp. 30-37.

³*The Cooperative English Expression Tests, Information Concerning Their Construction, Interpretation, and Use*. Princeton, New Jersey: Cooperative Test Division, Educational Testing Service, July, 1951.

⁴Robert L. Wright, "A Standardized English Test Under the Microscope," *College Composition and Communication*, February 1958, pp. 52-57.

a list of so-called "unpardonables" which count heavily against the writer if they are found in his paper. In addition, the readers are told not to be seriously concerned with the ideas in the paper or the organization of these ideas. Instead the papers are to be scrutinized for the following unpardonable errors: (1) the fragment sentence, (2) the incoherent sentence, (3) the fused sentence, (4) faulty pronoun reference, (5) faulty agreement of subject and verb, (6) flagrant vulgarisms, (7) misspelling of common words.

Although a thorough orientation of new members of the All-College English Committee does encourage objectivity in reading student papers, the element of subjectivity is usually present in the evaluation of writing. Faced with this fact, the English department at Brockport has come to realize that neither this committee nor the Cooperative English tests can predict with complete accuracy whether or not all students whose ability to write is questionable ought to be enrolled in remedial writing sections. Consequently, the policy of the All-College English Committee has been to recommend only the very weakest writers for these sections, and

to do so after a conference with the student and consultation with his English instructor.

Next fall the department plans to experiment with the new STEP Essay tests of writing ability recently developed by the Educational Testing Service which "seek to measure comprehensively the full range of skills involved in the process of good writing."⁵ The publishers further state that

The Essay tests were developed in the hope of assisting teachers to check their judgments of the ability to write. The teacher uses the same topics for writing as have been used by other teachers and checks the papers produced by his students by comparing them with sample papers marked by experts who have agreed upon the ratings the papers should have. The sample or comparison papers represent not what the experts might expect or hope for as standards, but what exist in practice in many schools.⁶

Most teachers of English will join the publishers in hoping that the new STEP tests of writing ability will fill the need for which they were developed.

⁵General Description of the Step Series. Princeton, New Jersey: Cooperative Test Division, Educational Testing Service, 1957, p. 6.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

Staff Room Interchange

Metamorphosis of the Impromptu

It is with interest and gratification that one discovers, in an article by Ralph Renwick, Jr. ("An Argument for the Impromptu Theme," *College Composition and Communication*, December, 1957), that the old bugaboo, the impromptu theme, has enlarged its scope and function, becoming "one of the best ways of encouraging . . . reading" as well as acquiring other virtues. But that such a metamorphosis could take place over night, as it were, or out of sight of most of us seems at least improbable; hence I hasten to point out that the writer's definition of *impromptu* differs somewhat from mine. Once, when the ACD was being com-

pared, the word *impromptu*, in its central sense at least, meant "made or done without preparation," and it was in this sense that the word was applied as a descriptive label for a certain kind of theme writing when I began to teach communication about a decade ago. In those days the only preparation a student made for an *impromptu* theme was the thumbnail outline he squeezed out in the first five minutes of the fifty-minute period, before he undertook to describe the box or explain why college dating practices needed improvement.

The only further sense of *impromptu* one used to encounter was in a depraved con-

notation, employed by student and teacher alike though for different reasons. From the student's point of view the writing of such themes was seldom, if ever, accepted as an honest attempt at the business of accurate measurement. On the contrary it was viewed, albeit docilely enough, as simply another instrument of academic torture, calculated by its very nature to produce indifferent results. While I never made a survey of student opinion, I recall most vividly the complaint that no one ever wrote his best work under such artificial conditions, and I am afraid more than once I silently agreed with the complainant. I never recall any student then or now approving of the practice, though Mr. Renwick has had some satisfactory answers on his self-inspection questionnaire.

From the teacher's point of view the word *impromptu* used inevitably to suggest a theme written under such conditions that the result was likely to be evil, a paper half planned and hurriedly dashed off, fraught with bad grammar and incompetent spelling, one that had to be graded by a special, and regrettably lowered, standard. Of course, the *impromptu* had, and I suppose still has, a noble purpose, the encouragement of virtue. It is almost impossible, unless a student is fortunate enough to be twins, for an *impromptu* to be written by a brother or sister, as the case may be. The only subsidiary purpose for this exercise, of considerable validity, was and still is as an act of collective discipline, for which it is modestly effective.

The author arguing in favor of these devices has certainly improved a bad business, for at least he has broadened the meaning of *impromptu* in the technical language of composition. Any change may be thought to be in the right direction. But let us examine his definition; for him an *impromptu* theme is one written only after the student has studied and thoroughly digested an essay or two outside of class and, presumably, given the matter much serious thought. No one can object to this. But it is not quite clear from the article, at least to me, whether the question on which the student writes is given to him beforehand, along with the reading assignment, or whether he is merely at that time given a nice, helpful hint. Does the teacher assign Alfred Mirsky's essay, "Rats and Men," say on Monday, suggesting only that the students consider the proposition that "perhaps 'gentling' can improve human beings" and then present the specific question,

"Have you encountered 'gentling' in any phase of your education?" on Friday, or is the question given simultaneously with the reading assignment? It makes a difference.

If the latter, I am very much afraid the resulting theme is by no means *impromptu*, no matter how much one stretches the definition. Moreover, it defeats the perhaps questionable aims, as I indicated them, of such an assignment. Writing in the classroom or laboratory has both advantages and disadvantages (that is quite another subject), but it is not necessarily *impromptu*. It may be, in this case, if the question is presented after the reading has been attended to, if it is asked immediately before writing, and if the possibility of alternate questions existed all along. Then, in a sense, a theme that grows from a previous reading assignment may be more or less *impromptu*, if there can be such a thing as degrees of lack of preparation.

Doubtless a broadened definition of *impromptu* invites semantic equivocation, but for the moment let us set aside such considerations and try to examine the merits of an *impromptu* performance as set forth by this advocate of classroom composition. Among other things, it is claimed that such an assignment will encourage the student to "read slowly and thoughtfully." He may even have to do some rereading. Certainly thoughtful reading is desirable, though it may be admitted that the amount and kind of thought accorded, say, Mickey Spillane differs from that one gives a chemistry assignment. Moreover, I have some reservations about the value of reading Mirsky's essay more than once or, for that matter, reading it very slowly. Some essays are to be tasted rather than chewed, and it seems to me most of those in freshman anthologies fall into the former classification. It would be wasteful to teach, or even encourage, students to read the articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* with the same painstaking attention they should accord to Aristotle. Moreover, reading slowly—at least material of this nature—does not necessarily indicate either thoroughness or thoughtfulness. For example, in a present class I am teaching while there are six students whose reading comprehension is significantly better when they read slowly, there are three or possibly four whose comprehension is worse. One student whose comprehension score was in the 96th percentile when he read at a rate that placed him in the 68th percentile dropped, in compre-

hension, to the 75th percentile when he decreased his rate to the 38th percentile. But far more significant, I think, is the fact that four of the best students in the class read at rates that placed them in the 96th, 98th, 98th, and 99th percentiles and scored in the 94th, 95th, 99th, and 99th percentiles, respectively, in comprehension. There is nothing especially unusual about such performances, and if they are not accidental they surely indicate that for the usual material of communications courses speed should be encouraged. At least one freshman anthology I have used implicitly recognizes the fact; I refer to the *Meaning in Reading* by Professors Wise, Congleton, Spivey, and Morris, which includes a provocative and useful series of timed reading exercises.

Perhaps the defender of the impromptu meant *carefully* when he wrote *slowly* in his attack on what he calls skimming. In that case my objections may be impertinent, though it is difficult to see how such experiences as those indicated by my figures can easily be ignored. But on a further count I suspect the "prepared" impromptu of inadequacy because, it seems to me, it discourages independent thought after the study of the assignment. The business of selecting and limiting a topic is an essential part of writing, and it is one of the most difficult tasks an instructor has to teach. The four examples cited in the article provide, in effect, advanced limitations of the topic of the paper. In short the instructor has already done a considerable part of the work for the student, and one can easily envision a somewhat more exacting set of questions which would serve as an outline, in the form of a thesis statement or central idea, for the theme. Such limitation discourages full exercise of intellectual power and accounts, I think, in part for the fact that some students do pretty well in composition courses but appear to be crippled when they are asked to do an elementary term paper in, say, history.

Examine the paper written in answer to the question about Mirsky's essay. It is technically satisfactory if stylistically undistinguished. The grammar is good, though the diction is unexceptional. There are no misspelled words. It certainly relates the reading assignment to the student's experience. But is it a good theme, an A paper? In the first place, though it follows the recommended method, it seems to do everything almost in miniature, for it is too short to develop any intellectual depth

(about 350 words, I should say). 'Gentling,' the student claims has been perpetrated upon her by a music teacher: "Whenever I do not have my lesson prepared my teacher simply tells me not to worry about it . . ." because of his understanding nature, no doubt. According, she says, "I feel twice as bad going to music unprepared . . . than I would going to face a teacher who would rant and rave whenever I was unprepared." Mirsky, I am afraid, had more success with his rats; this student obviously is not going to master Mozart no matter how much the teacher "gentles" her. In my opinion she should be beaten, for she has either missed the point of the essay or, what is more likely, led her instructor in English down the garden path with the intention of trifling with him. I find it difficult to believe seriously that our college students are, most of them, either so empty-headed or so frivolous-minded. And I do not think this particular assignment has elicited much to be proud of beyond a certain felicity with basic English. It would have been more profitable to have asked the student to find her own rats. I have an idea she could have done this job impromptu as well as what she did.

Speaking for myself, I would not, after assigning an impromptu on college parking or sex life back of the gym, have the temerity to ask my students what they thought of my assignment. At best they would surely complain about being asked to produce under such artificial conditions and claim that my assignment was no measure of their real abilities. And surely some of them would know and resent the fact that by fulfilling the assignment they were subjecting their virtue to verification. I do not like impromptu themes, but I am not so naive that I am willing to dispense with all writing done under my eagle eye. Allowing this aim to have some merit, one may bring himself to admit that students when any preparation is allowed may find some way to philander, providing they have such propensities. Some years ago when I taught in a writing laboratory, one young lady concealed her prepared versions in a place where I dared not tap in hopes I would hear paper crinkle. And no matter how closely I watched her, she always presented me with a perfect version, though she was patently a better criminal than she was a student. Add to such considerations the fact that in-class themes generally lack quality, though they certainly obviate labor on the

part of the instructor, and I think I will continue to avoid them when I can, reverting to the impromptu in its pure sense on rare, unannounced occasions. I am simply not convinced that in any sense impromptu themes greatly "enrich" the study of communication. They are not even harmless,

though they are sometimes necessary, for they steal precious time from more important considerations. Hence, while I applaud Mr. Renwick's boldness of definition, I find it difficult to agree with his contentions.

ROBERT O. EVANS

University of Kentucky

On "Metamorphosis of the Impromptu"

Professor Evans has provided a better definition of my writing assignment and of the kind of reading we should encourage whatever the reading rate may be. Moreover, he has contributed some stimulating remarks on two basic educational problems. First, he has been refreshingly frank about student dishonesty. The cynicism with which many of our students approach academic work deserves our attention far more than the decline and fall of the pseudo-impromptu theme. Second, Professor Evans

has emphasized the need to foster independent thought. The assignment I discussed would be improved if the instructor simply gave the class a provocative statement from an essay they had read, and asked them to discuss it. I might add that if Professor Evans is as entertaining and as stimulating in class as he has been in this article, he has no need of my assignment anyway.

RALPH RENWICK, JR.

Michigan State University

The Poorer Student Is Still with Us

Feeling that a more thoughtful effort should be made to deal with students deficient in English enrolled in Morningside College, President Richard Palmer asked me to investigate what other colleges were doing in this respect. We knew of and had discussed in faculty meeting, the University of Illinois' action to debar "English Zero" students after a certain date. Our own problem, to be specific, was that 155 of the 303 freshmen who took the standard Cooperative English Test in reading comprehension and mechanics and effectiveness of expression had received grades that year below the national median of 52.

Accordingly, I prepared a questionnaire, basing the queries largely on questions raised in a general faculty meeting when the staff was discussing what should be done with such students. My questions were aimed to discover what each institution's policy was as to admission of subfreshman English students, what schools had courses in remedial English and what progress they thought students were making in these, how students were selected for such courses, who taught them, what the subject matter of the course was, how long the courses continued, and what credit, if any, was given. The questionnaire also asked whether the college had a reading clinic and, if so, whether this seemed to fulfill its purpose. Many valuable hints drawn from the experience of the instructors answering were

obtained by a final request for helpful suggestions. Those replying were directors of Freshman English, teachers of Remedial English, and heads of English departments.

As some of the same institutions (and persons) were queried, some of my answers were similar to the replies in the Symposium, "Has English Zero Seen Its Day?" in the *College Composition and Communication* for May, 1957. However, as Morningside is a small Methodist college with an enrollment of 1200 we were interested in finding what small private colleges were doing, and so the questionnaire was sent to them as well as to larger colleges and Universities. Unlike the Symposium, my questionnaire brought information that, even now, various colleges are making plans to install a remedial program for English or to improve one which they already have. Some colleges, both large and small, report that their present remedial program is successful. Sometimes, such programs are the result of long experiment. Other colleges replying would agree that "English Zero" had seen its day. There were other differences and likenesses to the Symposium which would take a longer paper to explain.¹ Some instructors emphasized the importance of individual motivation in overcoming a student's handicaps of average

¹Miss Hadley has submitted a fuller account which may be published in a later issue. (Ed.)

ability and poor preparation. It would seem that the area from which a college draws most of its students has a great influence on the college's policies regarding admission and training of weak students.

After the results were in last December, I found the answers so diversified that I was not able to make a very good tabulation of them. Instead, I finally prepared a thirty-page abstract to send to the colleges and universities who had so kindly explained their systems.

What is Morningside College doing with the "English Zero" student in the light of this preliminary study? Not all our plans are completed, but we were impressed with the work of some colleges who make what might be called a positive approach. So this year, like Vanderbilt and Oglethorpe Universities and some colleges we are dividing our freshmen into three levels according to ability and making some variation of the work on each level. Freshman English sections at all levels will attend class four hours a week, write one theme a week, and have two of the same texts, a handbook and a book of essays. The basic

level will spend more time on mechanics of writing, usage, functional grammar, and spelling, and will have a workbook. The regular level will do extra reading, while the advanced level will do still more reading and write longer papers. We are contemplating a tutoring program for the weakest English students, in which upperclassmen under the supervision of an English professor would do the teaching. A reading clinic as a future project may also be the subject of study. The number of colleges reporting good results from both a tutoring program which gives individual help and a reading clinic shows that these aids are growing in favor. It has been suggested that tests might be given to entering freshmen in the spring before their enrollment so that some of them might make up their English deficiencies before the beginning of the first semester. We hope also to co-operate with elementary and secondary schools in this area in an effort to solve our mutual English problems.

EDITH HADLEY
Morningside College
Sioux City, Iowa

A New Approach to Freshman Composition at Duke

The present Freshman English course at Duke University is a conventional one: it has its weekly theme, its occasional theme conference, its essay-reader; its poetry-drama-short story anthology, and its three class meetings a week. It is a sound course and has a solid record of achievement. The difficulty has been chiefly in making it sufficiently adaptable. Even with A-sections for the best students and L-sections for the lowest, we have had trouble in satisfying the varied needs of our students. Professor Charles E. Ward, Chairman of the Department, after pondering these problems, resolved to seek a solution by departing from the framework of the standard three class meetings a week and by making other changes. To test his theories, he instituted this year a pilot group of three sections taught by Mr. Richard Van Fossen. During this year, also, various committees, partly guided by Mr. Van Fossen's experience, have shaped the details.

Going back to the indisputable first principle that teaching composition is primarily an individual matter, the Department built the new course around the conference. Thus it is planned that a consultation between student and instructor will take place each week. At this time the student will present

his theme to the instructor, who will then in the presence of the student go over the paper critically and give it a grade. In addition to the conference, the student will also each week attend a meeting of his section. This class meeting is retained because there are certain matters in composition and the interpretation of literature which can best be presented and discussed in a group. In most weeks the third meeting will be a lecture to groups of 200 or so on some topic in composition or literature (principally the latter) which is relevant to the current assignments in the syllabus. These lectures will usually, though not always, be given by a senior member of the Department. One intent of the lectures is to give the freshman a chance to come in contact with as many members of the Department as possible—and vice versa. If these lectures prove successful, they should come to mean something in the cultural life of the campus.

Since the weekly conference will demand much time and energy, the Administration readily agreed to reduce the size of sections from the present average of 22 to 18, and the number of sections for a full load from four to three. For a full-time instructor teaching only freshmen (there will ac-

tually be very few so doing) the weekly scheduled assignment would be three hours in the classroom and perhaps sixteen hours in conference. Since the instructor will have only one class preparation each week and since his themes will be graded in the conference, he should have considerable free time each week for personal reading and research. The schedule is arranged so that teachers having both freshmen and upper-class courses can meet them on the same cycle.

Suggestions for the syllabus have come from all ranks in the Department. The proposed readings will be in the literature, American and English, of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The assignments during the fall term will be in the essay, the novel, and the short story; and in the spring term,

in the drama and poetry. Subjects for themes will be drawn from, or suggested by, the readings.

The proposed course has been the object of much interest both within the department and without. The administration has been most sympathetic and has cheerfully assumed the added cost of instruction. With such backing we have high hopes that the new Freshman English will result in a higher level of proficiency in undergraduate writing and that the course will be more interesting to students and instructors. We hope also that the instructor's time will be more at his own disposal for use in his intellectual advancement.

LEWIS PATTON
Duke University

Conquer with the Yataghan

While standing in a breakfast line at a college union building, I was impressed by the fact that English teachers aren't the only persons to suffer from student inability to use clear and specific language. I soon discovered that almost every student when his time came to order would point a wavering forefinger at the long trays of breakfast rolls on the shelf behind the counter and utter an unhelpful, "Give me one of those." The attendant's finger would dance from one heap to another as she inquired, "A long john? A cinnamon roll? A glazed doughnut?"

After reading stacks of themes with phrases like "a lot of good food," "very many beautiful flowers," and "quite a big tree," the composition teacher can share in the counter girl's exasperation. With scores of thousands of exact words available in the great English vocabulary, why must the student employ instead a limited number of slipshod phrases?

As I was struggling one day in Freshman English class to get the students to give more specific words for the general term *weapon*, a thought occurred to me. It might be useful to have the student supplement his written exercises in word choice with drawings to show the amazing variety of articles designated by a class word and how much more serviceable a specific term is in conveying an image of what is actually intended.

Taking the term *sword* as an illustration, I explored the *Webster's New International Dictionary* and had no trouble locating drawings of a scimitar, saber, epee, Roman

sword, cutlass, and even a yataghan, all of which could be copied readily. The dictionary sketch of a yataghan convinced me that the word *sword* included more objects than I supposed and that such an exercise could be a profitable one. Accordingly when the opportunity came, I drew my sketches of these swords on the blackboard and then asked the students to bring the next day in addition to their usual written work five illustrations to show more specific objects in a general class. Besides dictionaries, I pointed out that encyclopedias and textbooks might also yield thought-provoking illustrations.

The drawings turned in the next day provided a decided change in the appearance of the class papers. Illustrations of nasturtium, elm, locust, ivy, and horse chestnut leaves gave one an idea of the variations possible under the general term *leaf*; and cut-out pictures richly colored made one realize there are not just roses but many specific varieties of roses. Here were drawings of manicure scissors, pocket scissors, lampwick scissors, embroidery scissors, nail scissor, and button-hole scissors following sketches of hockey ice skates, figure ice skates, racing ice skates, strap-on roller skates. Outline figures of durum, club Marquis, Selkirk, and Mida wheat succeeded pictures of table chairs, rocking chairs, sedan chairs, high chairs, and wheel chairs. Though the illustrations did not make out of the students little Flauberts intent upon fixing the exact word in the exact place, it seemed to make them more aware of the myriads of objects in this world and of the

prodigious vocabulary that has been created to name them.

Next quarter I'm hoping to get a student with artistic abilities to show specific subdivisions of the term *shorts*. Let's see. There are Bermuda shorts, pedal pushers, Ja-

maica shorts, briefs, Capri pants, and short shorts.

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Free Reading in the Communication Course

Reading lists for freshmen are a familiar story. In most courses, however, a free reading assignment is considered collateral, which means that it is secondary in importance to regular page assignments in an anthology. Anthology. To the average freshman the very word is like a yawn. In my communications classes in the State Teachers College at California, Pennsylvania, it was decided to use the freshmen's tastes to best advantage. The anthology was discarded. The free reading assignment was the only assignment made for literature.

This scheme is now being followed for the second year in a five-hour communication course in which one or two hours a week are given to literature. During the year, students are expected to read from four categories: modern American and British novels and short stories; non-fiction prose, with emphasis on essays; continental novels; poetry; and drama. Although suggestions are made about what might be read, no student is required to follow the suggestions. Any mention of minimum requirements in terms of numbers of books to be read is assiduously avoided.

Brief reviews of fifty to a hundred words are written on all works read and the student is expected to be able to discuss his reading informally in class. Regular conferences with each student give the instructor an opportunity to ask detailed questions on books students report as read. There are also individual essay examinations. Dishonesty has apparently not been encouraged. And, perhaps surprisingly, the overall management of the program has been possible.

Under this plan, students have read from five to twenty books a semester, sometimes totaling over 6,000 pages. There has been, as one might anticipate, wide divergence in the works chosen. Spillane has been read along with Shelley. The instructor, however, managed to remain relatively unperturbed even when one student found enjoyment in Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*. A basic assumption of the course is that there is hope for the freshman who reads—even trash—no hope for the one who reads nothing.

The freshmen in this program read. Some of them read voraciously. Moreover, they read with a greater zest than students who receive specific assignments. The freshmen know that they are free to leave the novels, dramas, or poems which are not for them; but, generally speaking, their selections have been in good literary taste. Moreover, it is hoped that the student, reading in a college class somewhat as one reads out of class, will be encouraged to continue as a reader after completion of the course.

Student comment, based on an anonymous evaluation sheet, has been almost consistently favorable. And at least several who arrived "hating" English have seen the intellectual light.

Textbooks are, of course, necessary and valuable tools. But this teacher teaches communication best by throwing the traditional anthology out of the ivied window.

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Pascal, writing in his *Provincial Letters* in 1656 upon a subject obscured by medieval subtleties and distorted by party passions, is . . . just, polite, and lucid; he does not even affect the magnificent disdain of Gibbon, but is a civilized man talking to other civilized men, and therefore all the more deadly in debate. But it is fallacies that he would kill, not those who maintain them. He knows that the art of controversy is, not to begin with invective, but to state your case in such a way that those who like invective will supply it themselves against your adversary.

—Arthur Clutton-Brock, *The Defects of English Prose*

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